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THE PSALMS

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

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PSALMS XC.—CL

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
PSALM	XC.	3
„	XCI.	14
„	XCII.	26
„	XCIII.	33
„	XCIV.	38
„	XCV.	48
„	XCVI.	55
„	XCVII.	60
„	XCVIII.	68
„	XCIX.	71
„	C.	78
„	CI.	81
„	CII.	87
„	CIII.	101
„	CIV.	111

PAGE

PSALM CV. 124

„ CVI. 137

„ CVII. 155

„ CVIII. 169

„ CIX. 172

„ CX. 183

„ CXI. 193

„ CXII. 198

„ CXIII. 205

„ CXIV. 210

„ CXV. 214

„ CXVI. 221

„ CXVII. 229

„ CXVIII. 231

„ CXIX. 244

„ CXX. 292

„ CXXI. 297

„ CXXII. 303

„ CXXIII. 307

„ CXXIV. 310

PAGE

PSALM CXXV. 313

" CXXVI. 318

" CXXVII. 323

" CXXVIII. 327

" CXXIX. 331

" CXXX. 335

" CXXXI. 341

" CXXXII. 344

" CXXXIII. 355

" CXXXIV. 359

" CXXXV. 361

" CXXXVI. 366

" CXXXVII. 370

" CXXXVIII. 376

" CXXXIX. 382

" CXL. 393

" CXLI. 398

" CXLII. 405

" CXLIII. 410

" CXLIV. 418

PAGE

PSALM CXLV. 424

" CXLVI. 434

" CXLVII. 440

" CXLVIII. 448

" CXLIX. 454

" CL. 458

BOOK IV.

PSALMS XC.—CVI.

PSALM XC.

1 Lord, a dwelling-place hast Thou been for us
In generation after generation.
2 Before the mountains were born,
Or Thou gavest birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting, Thou art God.
3 Thou turnest frail man back to dust,
And sayest, "Return, ye sons of man."
4 For a thousand years in Thine eyes are as yesterday when
it was passing,
And a watch in the night.
5 Thou dost flood them away, a sleep do they become,
In the morning they are like grass [which] springs afresh.
6 In the morning it blooms and springs afresh,
By evening it is cut down and withers.

7 For we are wasted away in Thine anger,
And by Thy wrath have we been panic-struck.
8 Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee,
Our secret [sins] in the radiance of Thy face.
9 For all our days have vanished in Thy wrath,
We have spent our years as a murmur.
10 The days of our years—in them are seventy years,
Or if [we are] in strength, eighty years,
And their pride is [but] trouble and vanity,
For it is passed swiftly, and we fly away.
11 Who knows the power of Thine anger,
And of Thy wrath according to the [due] fear of Thee?
12 To number our days—thus teach us,
That we may win ourselves a heart of wisdom.

13 Return, Jehovah; how long?
And have compassion upon Thy servants.
14 Satisty us in the morning [with] Thy loving-kindness,
And we shall ring out joyful cries and be glad all our days.

15 Gladden us according to the days [when] Thou hast afflicted us,
The years [when] we have seen adversity.
16 To Thy servants let Thy working be manifested,
And Thy majesty upon their children.
17 And let the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us,
And the work of our hands establish upon us,
Yea, the work of our hands establish it.

THE sad and stately music of this great psalm befits the dirge of a world. How artificial and poor, beside its restrained emotion and majestic simplicity, do even the most deeply felt strains of other poets on the same themes sound! It preaches man's mortality in immortal words. In its awestruck yet trustful gaze on God's eternal being, in its lofty sadness, in its archaic directness, in its grand images so clearly cut and so briefly expressed, in its emphatic recognition of sin as the occasion of death, and in its clinging to the eternal God who can fill fleeting days with ringing gladness, the psalm utters once for all the deepest thoughts of devout men. Like the God whom it hymns, it has been "for generation after generation" an asylum.

The question of its authorship has a literary interest, but little more. The arguments against the Mosaic authorship, apart from those derived from the as yet unsettled questions in regard to the Pentateuch, are weak. The favourite one, adduced by Cheyne after Hupfeld and others, is that the duration of human life was greater, according to the history, in Moses' time than seventy years; but the prolonged lives of certain conspicuous persons in that period do not warrant a conclusion as to the average length of life; and the generation that fell in the wilderness can clearly not have lived beyond the psalmist's limit. The characteristic Mosaic tone in regarding death as the wages of sin, the massive simplicity and the entire absence

of dependence on other parts of the Psalter, which separate this psalm from almost all the others of the Fourth Book, are strongly favourable to the correctness of the superscription. Further, the section vv. 7–12 is distinctly historical, and is best understood as referring not to mankind in general, but to Israel; and no period is so likely to have suggested such a strain of thought as that when the penalty of sin was laid upon the people, and they were condemned to find graves in the wilderness. But however the question of authorship may be settled, the psalm is "not of an age, but for all time."

It falls into three parts, of which the two former contain six verses each, while the last has but five. In the first section (vv. 1–6), the transitoriness of men is set over against the eternity of God; in the second, (vv. 7–12) that transitoriness is traced to its reason, namely sin; and in the third, prayer that God would visit His servants is built upon both His eternity and their fleeting days. The short ver. 1 blends both the thoughts which are expanded in the following verses, while in it the singer breathes awed contemplation of the eternal God as the dwelling-place or asylum of generations that follow each other, swift and unremembered, as the waves that break on some lonely shore. God is invoked as "Lord," the sovereign ruler, the name which connotes His elevation and authority. But, though lofty, He is not inaccessible. As some ancestral home shelters generation after generation of a family, and in its solid strength stands unmoved, while one after another of its somewhile tenants is borne forth to his grave, and the descendants sit in the halls where centuries before their ancestors sat, God is the home of all who find any real home amidst the fluctuating nothings of this shadowy world. The con-

trast of His eternity and our transiency is not bitter, though it may hush us into wisdom, if we begin with the trust that He is the abiding abode of short-lived man. For this use of *dwelling-place* compare Deut. xxxiii. 27.

What God has been to successive generations results from what He is in Himself before all generations. So ver. 2 soars to the contemplation of His absolute eternity, stretching boundless on either side of "this bank and shoal of time"—"From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God"; and in that name is proclaimed His self-derived strength, which, being eternal, is neither derived from nor diminished by time, that first gives to, and then withdraws from, all creatures their feeble power. The remarkable expressions for the coming forth of the material world from the abyss of Deity regard creation as a birth. The Hebrew text reads in ver. 2 *b* as above, "Thou gavest birth to"; but a very small change in a single vowel gives the possibly preferable reading which preserves the parallelism of a passive verb in both clauses, "Or the earth and the world were brought forth."

The poet turns now to the other member of his antithesis. Over against God's eternal Being is set the succession of man's generations, which has been already referred to in ver. 1. This thought of successiveness is lost unless ver. 3 *b* is understood as the creative fiat which replaces by a new generation those who have been turned back to dust. Death and life, decay and ever-springing growth, are in continual alternation. The leaves, which are men, drop; the buds swell and open. The ever-knitted web is being ever run down and woven together again. It is a dreary sight, unless one can say with our psalm, "*Thou* turnest . . . *Thou* sayest, Return." Then one understands that it is not

aimless or futile. If a living Person is behind the transiencies of human life, these are still pathetic and awe-kindling, but not bewildering. In ver. 3 *a* there is clear allusion to Gen. iii. 19. The word rendered "dust" may be an adjective taken as neuter = *that which is crushed, i.e.* dust; or, as others suppose, a substantive = *crushing*; but is probably best understood in the former sense. The psalm significantly uses the word for *man* which connotes frailty, and in *b* the expression "sons of man" which suggests birth.

The psalmist rises still higher in ver. 4. It is much to say that God's Being is endless, but it is more to say that He is raised above Time, and that none of the terms in which men describe duration have any meaning for Him. A thousand years, which to a man seem so long, are to Him dwindled to nothing, in comparison with the eternity of His Being. As Peter has said, the converse must also be true, and "one day be with the Lord as a thousand years." He can crowd a fulness of action into narrow limits. Moments can do the work of centuries. The longest and shortest measures of time are absolutely equivalent, for both are entirely inapplicable, to His timeless Being. But what has this great thought to do here, and how is the "For" justified? It may be that the psalmist is supporting the representation of ver. 2, God's eternity, rather than that of ver. 3, man's transiency; but, seeing that this verse is followed by one which strikes the same note as ver. 3, it is more probable that here, too, the dominant thought is the brevity of human life. It never seems so short, as when measured against God's timeless existence. So, the underlying thought of ver. 3, namely, the brevity of man's time, which is there illustrated by the picture

of the endless flux of generations, is here confirmed by the thought that all measures of time dwindle to equal insignificance with Him.

The psalmist next takes his stand on the border-moment between to-day and yesterday. How short looks the day that is gliding away into the past! "A watch in the night" is still shorter to our consciousness, for it passes over us unnoted.

The passing of mortal life has hitherto been contemplated in immediate connection with God's permanence, and the psalmist's tone has been a wonderful blending of melancholy and trust. But in ver. 5 the sadder side of his contemplations becomes predominant. Frail man, frail because sinful, is his theme. The figures which set forth man's mortality are grand in their unelaborated brevity. They are like some of Michael Angelo's solemn statues. "Thou floodest them away"—a bold metaphor, suggesting the rush of a mighty stream, bearing on its tawny bosom crops, household goods, and corpses, and hurrying with its spoils to the sea. "They become a sleep." Some would take this to mean falling into the sleep of death; others would regard life as compared to a sleep—"for before we are rightly conscious of being alive, we cease to live" (Luther, quoted by Cheyne); while others find the point of comparison in the disappearance, without leaving a trace behind, of the noisy generations, sunk at once into silence, and "occupying no more space on the scroll of Time than a night's sleep" (so Kay). It is tempting to attach "in the morning" to "a sleep," but the recurrence of the expression in ver. 7 points to the retention of the present division of clauses, according to which the springing grass greets the eye at dawn, as if created

by a night's rain. The word rendered "springs afresh" is taken in two opposite meanings, being by some rendered *passes away*, and by others as above. Both meanings come from the same radical notion of change, but the latter is evidently the more natural and picturesque here, as preserving, untroubled by any intrusion of an opposite thought, the cheerful picture of the pastures rejoicing in the morning sunshine, and so making more impressive the sudden, sad change wrought by evening, when all the fresh green blades and bright flowers lie turned already into brown hay by the mower's scythe and the fierce sunbeams.

> "So passeth, in the passing of an hour,
> Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower."

The central portion of the psalm (vv. 7–12) narrows the circle of the poet's vision to Israel, and brings out the connection between death and sin. The transition from truths of universal application is marked by the use of *we* and *us*, while the past tenses indicate that the psalm is recounting history. That transitoriness assumes a still more tragic aspect, when regarded as the result of the collision of God's "wrath" with frail man. How can such stubble but be wasted into ashes by such fire? And yet this is the same psalmist who has just discerned that the unchanging Lord is the dwelling-place of all generations. The change from the previous thought of the eternal God as the dwelling-place of frail men is very marked in this section, in which the destructive anger of God is in view. But the singer felt no contradiction between the two thoughts, and there is none. We do not understand the full blessedness of believing that God is our asylum, till we understand that He is our asylum

from all that is destructive in Himself; nor do we know the significance of the universal experience of decay and death, till we learn that it is not the result of our finite being, but of sin.

That one note sounds on in solemn persistence through these verses, therein echoing the characteristic Mosaic lesson, and corresponding with the history of the people in the desert. In ver. 7 the cause of their wasting away is declared to be God's wrath, which has scattered them as in panic (Psalm xlviii. 5). The occasion of that lightning flash of anger is confessed in ver. 8 to be the sins which, however hidden, stand revealed before God. The expression for "the light of Thy face" is slightly different from the usual one, a word being employed which means a luminary, and is used in Gen. i. for the heavenly bodies. The ordinary phrase is always used as expressing favour and blessing; but there is an illumination, as from an all-revealing light, which flashes into all dark corners of human experience, and "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." Sin smitten by that light must die. Therefore, in ver. 9, the consequence of its falling on Israel's transgressions is set forth. Their days vanish as mists before the sun, or as darkness glides out of the sky in the morning. Their noisy years are but as a murmur, scarce breaking the deep silence, and forgotten as soon as faintly heard. The psalmist sums up his sad contemplations in ver. 10, in which life is regarded as not only rigidly circumscribed within a poor seventy or, at most, eighty years, but as being, by reason of its transitoriness, unsatisfying and burdensome. The "pride" which is but trouble and vanity is that which John calls "the pride of life," the objects which, apart from God, men desire to win, and glory in possess-

ing. The self-gratulation would be less ridiculous or tragic, if the things which evoke it lasted longer, or we lasted longer to possess them. But seeing that they swiftly pass and we fly too, surely it is but "trouble" to fight for what is "vanity" when won, and what melts away so surely and soon.

Plainly, then, things being so, man's wisdom is to seek to know two things—the power of God's anger, and the measure of his own days. But alas for human levity and bondage to sense, how few look beyond the external, or lay to heart the solemn truth that God's wrath is inevitably operative against sin, and how few have any such just conception of it as to lead to reverential awe, proportioned to the Divine character which should evoke it! Ignorance and inoperative knowledge divide mankind between them, and but a small remnant have let the truth plough deep into their inmost being and plant there holy fear of God. Therefore, the psalmist prays for himself and his people, as knowing the temptations to inconsiderate disregard and to inadequate feeling of God's opposition to sin, that His power would take untaught hearts in hand and teach them this—to count their days. Then we shall bring home, as from a ripened harvest field, the best fruit which life can yield, "a heart of wisdom," which, having learned the power of God's anger, and the number of our days, turns itself to the eternal dwelling-place, and no more is sad, when it sees life ebbing away, or the generations moving in unbroken succession into the darkness.

The third part (vv. 13–17) gathers all the previous meditations into a prayer, which is peculiarly appropriate to Israel in the wilderness, but has deep meaning for all God's servants. We note the invocation of God by the covenant name "Jehovah," as contrasted with

the "Lord" of ver. 1. The psalmist draws nearer to God, and feels the closer bond of which that name is the pledge. His prayer is the more urgent, by reason of the brevity of life. So short is his time that he cannot afford to let God delay in coming to him and to his fellows. "How long?" comes pathetically from lips which have been declaring that their time of speech is so short. This is not impatience, but wistful yearning, which, even while it yearns, leaves God to settle His own time, and, while it submits, still longs. Night has wrapped Israel, but the psalmist's faith "awakes the morning," and he prays that its beams may soon dawn and Israel be satisfied with the longed-for loving-kindness (compare Psalm xxx. 5); for life at its longest is but brief, and he would fain have what remains of it be lit with sunshine from God's face. The only thing that will secure life-long gladness is a heart satisfied with the experience of God's love. That will make morning in mirk midnight; that will take all the sorrow out of the transiency of life. The days which are filled with God are long enough to satisfy us; and they who have Him for their own will be "full of days," whatever the number of these may be.

The psalmist believes that God's justice has in store for His servants joys and blessings proportioned to the duration of their trials. He is not thinking of any future beyond the grave; but his prayer is a prophecy, which is often fulfilled even in this life and always hereafter. Sorrows rightly borne here are factors determining the glory that shall follow. There is a proportion between the years of affliction and the millenniums of glory. But the final prayer, based upon all these thoughts of God's eternity and man's transitoriness, is not for blessedness, but for vision and

Divine favour on work done for Him. The deepest longing of the devout heart should be for the manifestation to itself and others of God's work. The psalmist is not only asking that God would put forth His acts in interposition for himself and his fellow-servants, but also that the full glory of these far-reaching deeds may be disclosed to their understandings as well as experienced in their lives. And since he knows that "through the ages an increasing purpose runs," he prays that coming generations may see even more glorious displays of Divine power than his contemporaries have done. How the sadness of the thought of fleeting generations succeeded by new ones vanishes when we think of them all as, in turn, spectators and possessors of God's "work"! But in that great work we are not to be mere spectators. Fleeting as our days are, they are ennobled by our being permitted to be God's tools; and if "the work of our hands" is the reflex or carrying on of His working, we can confidently ask that, though we the workers have to pass, it may be "established." "In our embers" may be "something that doth live," and that life will not all die which has done the will of God, but it and its doer will "endure for ever." Only there must be the descent upon us of "the graciousness" of God, before there can flow from us "deeds which breed not shame," but outlast the perishable earth and follow their doers into the eternal dwelling-place. The psalmist's closing prayer reaches further than he knew. Lives on which the favour of God has come down like a dove, and in which His will has been done, are not flooded away, nor do they die into silence like a whisper, but carry in themselves the seeds of immortality, and are akin to the eternity of God.

PSALM XCI.

1 He that sits in the secret place of the Most High,
In the shadow of the Almighty shall he lodge.

2 I will say to Jehovah, "My refuge and my fortress,
My God, in whom I will trust."

3 For He, He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler
From the pestilence that destroys.
4 With His pinions shall He cover thee,
And under His wings shalt thou take refuge,
A shield and target is His Troth.
5 Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night,
Of the arrow [that] flies by day,
6 Of the pestilence [that] stalks in darkness,
Of the sickness [that] devastates at noonday.
7 A thousand may fall at thy side,
And a myriad at thy right hand,
To thee it shall not reach.
8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou look on,
And see the recompense of the wicked.

9*a* "For Thou, Jehovah, art my refuge."

9*b* The Most High thou hast made thy dwelling-place.
10 No evil shall befall thee,
And no scourge shall come near thy tent.
11 For His angels will He command concerning thee,
To keep thee in all thy ways.
12 Upon [their] hands shall they bear thee,
Lest thou strike thy foot against a stone.
13 Upon lion and adder shalt thou tread,
Thou shalt trample upon young lion and dragon.

14 "Because to Me he clings, therefore will I deliver him
I will lift him high because he knows My name.

15 He shall call on Me, and I will answer him;
With him will I, even I, be in trouble,
I will rescue him and bring him to honour.
16 [With] length of days will I satisfy him,
And give him to gaze on My salvation."

THE solemn sadness of Psalm xc. is set in strong relief by the sunny brightness of this song of happy, perfect trust in the Divine protection. The juxtaposition is, however, probably due to the verbal coincidence of the same expression being used in both psalms in reference to God. In Psalm xc. 1, and in xci. 9, the somewhat unusual designation "dwelling-place" is applied to Him, and the thought conveyed in it runs through the whole of this psalm.

An outstanding characteristic of it is its sudden changes of persons; "He," "I," and "thou" alternate in a bewildering fashion, which has led to many attempts at explanation. One point is clear—that, in vv. 14–16, God speaks, and that He speaks of, not to, the person who loves and clings to Him. At ver. 14, then, we must suppose a change of speaker, which is unmarked by any introductory formula. Looking back over the remainder of the psalm, we find that the bulk of it is addressed directly *to* a person who must be the same as is spoken *of* in the Divine promises. The "him" of the latter is the "thee" of the mass of the psalm. But this mass is broken at two points by clauses alike in meaning, and containing expressions of trust (vv. 2, 9*a*). Obviously the unity of the psalm requires that the "I" of these two verses should be the "thou" of the great portion of the psalm, and the "he" of the last part. Each profession of trust will then be followed by assurances of safety thence resulting, ver. 2 having for pendant vv. 3–8, and ver. 9*a*

being followed by vv. 9 *b*–13. The two utterances of personal faith are substantially identical, and the assurances which succeed them are also in effect the same. It is by some supposed that this alternation of persons is due simply to the poet expressing partly "his own feelings as from himself, and partly as if they were uttered by another" (Perowne after Ewald). But that is not an explanation of the structure; it is only a statement of the structure which requires to be explained. No doubt the poet is expressing his own feelings or convictions all through the psalm: but why does he express them in this singular fashion?

The explanation which is given by Delitzsch, Stier, Cheyne and many others takes the psalm to be antiphonal, and distributes the parts among the voices of a choir, with some variations in the allocation.

But ver. 1 still remains a difficulty. As it stands it sounds flat and tautological, and hence attempts have been made to amend it, which will presently be referred to. But it will fall into the general antiphonal scheme, if it is regarded as a prelude, sung by the same voice which twice answers the single singer with choral assurances that reward his trust. We, then, have this distribution of parts: ver. 1, the broad statement of the blessedness of dwelling with God; ver. 2, a solo, the voice of a heart encouraged thereby to exercise personal trust; vv. 3–8, answers, setting forth the security of such a refuge; ver. 9 *a*, solo, reiterating with sweet monotony the word of trust; vv. 9 *b*–13, the first voice or chorus repeating with some variation the assurances of vv. 3–8; and vv. 14–16, God's acceptance of the trust and confirmation of the assurances.

There is, no doubt, difficulty in ver. 1; for, if it is taken as an independent sentence, it sounds tautological,

since there is no well-marked difference between "sitting" and "lodging," nor much between "secret place" and "shadow." But possibly the idea of safety is more strongly conveyed by "shadow" than by "secret place," and the meaning of the apparently identical assertion may be, that he who quietly enters into communion with God thereby passes into His protection; or, as Kay puts it, "Loving faith on man's part shall be met by faithful love on God's part." The LXX. changes the person of "will say" in ver. 2, and connects it with ver. 1 as its subject ("He that sits . . . that lodges . . . shall say"). Ewald, followed by Baethgen and others, regards ver. 1 as referring to the "I" of ver. 2, and translates "Sitting . . . I say." Hupfeld, whom Cheyne follows, cuts the knot by assuming that "Blessed is" has dropped out at the beginning of ver. 1, and so gets a smooth run of construction and thought ("Happy is he who sits . . . who lodges . . . who says"). It is suspiciously smooth, obliterates the characteristic change of persons, of which the psalm has other instances, and has no support except the thought that the psalmist would have saved us a great deal of trouble, if he had only been wise enough to have written so. The existing text is capable of a meaning in accordance with his general drift. A wide declaration like that of ver. 1 fittingly preludes the body of the song, and naturally evokes the pathetic profession of faith which follows.

According to the accents, ver. 2 is to be read "I will say, 'To Jehovah [belongs] my refuge,'" etc. But it is better to divide as above. Jehovah *is* the refuge. The psalmist speaks *to* Him, with the exclamation of yearning trust. He can only call Him by precious names, to use which, in however broken a fashion, is

an appeal that goes straight to His heart, as it comes straight from the suppliant's. The singer lovingly accumulates the Divine names in these two first verses. He calls God "Most High," "Almighty," when he utters the general truth of the safety of souls that enter His secret place; but, when he speaks his own trust, he addresses Jehovah, and adds to the wide designation "God" the little word "my," which claims personal possession of His fulness of Deity. The solo voice does not say much, but it says enough. There has been much underground work before that clear jet of personal "appropriating faith" could spring into light.

We might have looked for a Selah here, if this psalm had stood in the earlier books, but we can feel the brief pause before the choral answer comes in vv. 3–8. It sets forth in lofty poetry the blessings that such a trust secures. Its central idea is that of safety. That safety is guaranteed in regard to two classes of dangers—those from enemies, and those from diseases. Both are conceived of as divided into secret and open perils. Ver. 3 proclaims the trustful soul's immunity, and ver. 4 beautifully describes the Divine protection which secures it. Vv. 5, 6, expand the general notion of safety, into defence against secret and open foes and secret and open pestilences; while vv. 7, 8, sum up the whole, in a vivid contrast between the multitude of victims and the man sheltered in God, and looking out from his refuge on the wide-rolling flood of destruction. As in Psalm xviii. 5, Death is represented as a "fowler" into whose snares men heedlessly flutter, unless held back by God's delivering hand. The mention of pestilence in ver. 3 somewhat anticipates the proper order, as the same idea recurs in its appropriate place in ver. 6.

Hence the rendering "word," which requires no consonantal change, is adopted from the LXX. by several moderns. But that is feeble, and the slight irregularity of a double mention of one form of peril, which is naturally suggested by the previous reference to Death, is not of much moment. The beautiful description of God sheltering the trustful man beneath His pinions recalls Deut. xxxii. 11 and Psalms xvii. 8, lxiii. 7. The mother eagle, spreading her dread wing over her eaglets, is a wonderful symbol of the union of power and gentleness. It would be a bold hand which would drag the fledglings from that warm hiding-place and dare the terrors of that beak and claws. But this pregnant verse (4) not only tells of the strong defence which God is, but also, in a word, sets in clear light man's way of reaching that asylum. "Thou shalt take refuge." It is the word which is often vaguely rendered "trust," but which, if we retain its original signification, becomes illuminative as to what that trust is. The flight of the soul, conscious of nakedness and peril, to the safe shelter of God's breast is a description of faith which, in practical value, surpasses much learned dissertation. And this verse adds yet another point to its comprehensive statements, when, changing the figure, it calls God's *Troth*, or faithful adherence to His promises and obligations, our "shield and target." We have not to fly to a dumb God for shelter, or to risk anything upon a Peradventure. He has spoken, and His word is inviolable. Therefore, trust is possible. And between ourselves and all evil we may lift the shield of His Troth. His faithfulness is our sure defence, and Faith is our shield only in a secondary sense, its office being but to grasp our true defence, and to keep us well behind that.

The assaults of enemies and the devastations of pestilence are taken in vv. 5, 6, as types of all perils. These evils speak of a less artificial stage of society than that in which our experience moves, but they serve us as symbols of more complex dangers besetting outward and inward life. "The terror of the night" seems best understood as parallel with the "arrow that flies by day," in so far as both refer to actual attacks by enemies. Nocturnal surprises were favourite methods of assault in early warfare. Such an explanation is worthier than the supposition that the psalmist means demons that haunt the night. In ver. 6 Pestilence is personified as stalking, shrouded in darkness, the more terrible because it strikes unseen. Ver. 6 *b* has been understood, as by the Targum and LXX., to refer to demons who exercise their power in noonday. But this explanation rests upon a misreading of the word rendered "devastates." The other translated "sickness" is only found, besides this place, in Deut. xxxii. 24 ("destruction") and Isa. xxviii. 2 ("a destroying storm," lit. a storm of destruction), and in somewhat different form in Hosea xiii. 14. It comes from a root meaning *to cut*, and seems here to be a synonym for pestilence. Baethgen sees in "the arrow by day" the fierce sunbeams, and in "the *heat* (as he renders) which rages at noonday" the poisonous simoom. The trustful man, sheltered in God, looks on while thousands fall round him, as Israel looked from their homes on the Passover night, and sees that there is a God that judges and recompenses evil-doers by evil suffered.

Heartened by these great assurances, the single voice once more declares its trust. Ver. 9 *a* is best separated from *b*, though Hupfeld here again assumes that "thou hast said" has fallen out between "For" and "Thou."

This second utterance of trust is almost identical with the first. Faith has no need to vary its expression. "Thou, Jehovah, art my refuge" is enough for it. God's mighty name and its personal possession of all which that name means, as its own hiding-place, are its treasures, which it does not weary of recounting. Love loves to repeat itself. The deepest emotions, like song-birds, have but two or three notes, which they sing over and over again all the long day through. He that can use this singer's words of trust has a vocabulary rich enough.

The responsive assurances (vv. 9*b*–13) are, in like manner, substantially identical with the preceding ones, but differences may be discerned by which these are heightened in comparison with the former. The promise of immunity is more general. Instead of two typical forms of danger, the widest possible exemption from all forms of it is declared in ver. 10. *No* evil shall come near, *no* scourge approach, the "tent" of the man whose real and permanent "dwelling-place" is Jehovah. There are much beauty and significance in that contrast of the two homes in which a godly man lives, housing, as far as his outward life is concerned, in a transitory abode, which to-morrow may be rolled up and moved to another camping-place in the desert, but abiding, in so far as his true being is concerned, in God, the permanent dwelling-place through all generations. The transitory outward life has reflected on it some light of peaceful security from that true home. It is further noteworthy that the second group of assurances is concerned with active life, while the first only represented a passive condition of safety beneath God's wing. In vv. 11, 12, His angels take the place of protectors, and the sphere in which they

protect is "in all thy *ways*"—*i.e.*, in the activities of ordinary life. The dangers *there* are of stumbling, whether that be construed as referring to outward difficulties or to temptations to sin.

The perils, further specified in ver. 13, correspond to those of the previous part in being open and secret: the lion with its roar and leap, the adder with its stealthy glide among the herbage and its unlooked-for bite. So, the two sets of assurances, taken together, cover the whole ground of life, both in its moments of hidden communion in the secret place of the Most High, and in its times of diligent discharge of duty on life's common way. Perils of communion and perils of work are equally real, and equally may we be sheltered from them. God Himself spreads His wing over the trustful man, and sends His messengers to keep him, in all the paths appointed for him by God. The angels have no charge to take stones out of the way. Hinderances are good for us. Smooth paths weary and make persumptuous. Rough ones bring out our best and drive us to look to God. But His messengers have for their task to lift us on their palms over difficulties, not so that we shall not feel them to be difficult, but so that we shall not strike our foot against them. Many a man remembers the elevation and buoyancy of spirit which strangely came to him when most pressed by work or trouble. God's angels were bearing him up. Active life is full of open and secret foes as well as of difficulties. He that keeps near to God will pass unharmed through them all, and, with a foot made strong and firm by God's own power infused into it, will be able to crush the life out of the most formidable and the most sly assailants. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

Finally, God Himself speaks, and confirms and deepens the previous assurances. That He is represented as speaking *of*, not *to*, His servant increases the majesty of the utterance, by seeming to call the universe to hear, and converts promises to an individual into promises to every one who will fulfil the requisite conditions. These are threefold.

God desires that men should cling to Him, know His name, and call on Him. The word rendered "cling" includes more than "setting love upon" one. It means to bind or knit oneself to anything, and so embraces the cleaving of a fixed heart, of a "recollected" mind, and of an obedient will. Such clinging demands effort; for every hand relaxes its grasp, unless ever and again tightened. He who thus clings will come to "know" God's "name," with the knowledge which is born of experience, and is loving familiarity, not mere intellectual apprehension. Such clinging and knowledge will find utterance in continual converse with God, not only when needing deliverance, but in perpetual aspiration after Him.

The promises to such an one go very deep and stretch very far. "I will deliver him." So the previous assurance that no evil shall come nigh him is explained and brought into correspondence with the facts of life. Evil may be experienced. Sorrows will come. But they will not touch the central core of the true life, and from them God will deliver, not only by causing them to cease, but by fitting us to bear. Clinging to Him, a man will be "drawn out of many waters," like Peter on the stormy lake. "I will set him on high" is more than a parallel promise to that of deliverance. It includes that; for a man lifted to a height is safe from the flood that sweeps through the

valley, or from the enemies that ravage the plain. But that elevation, which comes from knowing God's name, brings more than safety, even a life lived in a higher region than that of things seen. "I will answer him." How can He fail to hear when they who trust Him cry? Promises, especially for the troubled, follow, which do not conflict with the earlier assurances, rightly understood. "I will be with him in trouble." God's presence is the answer to His servant's call. God comes nearer to devout and tried souls, as a mother presses herself caressingly closer to a weeping child. So, no man need add solitude to sadness, but may have God sitting with him, like Job's friends, waiting to comfort him with true comfort. And His presence delivers from, and glorifies after, trouble borne as becomes God's friend. The bit of dull steel might complain, if it could feel, of the pain of being polished, but the result is to make it a mirror fit to flash back the sunlight.

"With length of days will I satisfy him" is, no doubt, a promise belonging more especially to Old Testament times; but if we put emphasis on "satisfy," rather than on the extended duration, it may fairly suggest that, to the trustful soul, life is long enough, whatever its duration, and that the guest, who has sat at God's table here, is not unwilling to rise from it, when his time comes, being "satisfied with favour, and full of the goodness of the Lord." The vision of God's salvation, which is set last, seems from its position in the series to point, however dimly, to a vision which comes after earth's troubles and length of days. The psalmist's language implies not a mere casual beholding, but a fixed gaze. Delitzsch renders "revel in My salvation" (English translation). Cheyne

has "feast his eyes with." Such seeing is possession. The crown of God's promises to the man who makes God his dwelling-place is a full, rapturous experience of a full salvation, which follows on the troubles and deliverances of earth, and brings a more dazzling honour and a more perfect satisfaction.

PSALM XCII.

1 Good is it to give thanks to Jehovah,
And to harp to Thy name, Most High;
2 To declare in the morning Thy loving-kindness,
And thy faithfulness in the night seasons,
3 Upon a ten-stringed [instrument], even upon the psaltery,
With skilful music on the lyre.

4 For Thou hast gladdened me, Jehovah, with Thy working,
In the works of Thy hands will I shout aloud my joy.
5 How great are Thy works, Jehovah,
Exceeding deep are Thy purposes!
6 A brutish man knows not,
And a fool understands not this.

7 When the wicked sprang like herbage,
And all the workers of iniquity blossomed,
[It was only] for their being destroyed for ever.
8 But Thou art [enthroned] on high for evermore Jehovah!
9 For behold Thy enemies, Jehovah,
For behold Thy enemies—shall perish,
All the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.

10 But Thou hast exalted my horn like a wild ox,
I am anointed with fresh oil (?).
11 My eye also gazed on my adversaries,
Of them that rose against me as evil-doers my ear heard.
12 The righteous shall spring like the palm,
Like a cedar in Lebanon shall he grow.

13 Planted in the house of Jehovah,
They shall spring in the courts of our God.
14 Still shall they bear fruit in old age,
Full of sap and verdant shall they be.
15 To declare that Jehovah is upright,
My Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

AUTHORITIES differ in their arrangement of this psalm. Clearly, the first three verses are a prelude; and if these are left out of account, the remainder of the psalm consists of twelve verses, which fall into two groups of six each, the former of which mainly deals with the brief prosperity and final overthrow of the wicked, while the latter paints the converse truth of the security and blessedness of the righteous. Both illustrate the depth of God's works and purposes, which is the psalmist's theme. A further division of each of these six verses into groups of three is adopted by Delitzsch, and may be accepted. There will then be five strophes of three verses each, of which the first is introductory; the second and third, a pair setting forth the aspect of Providence towards the wicked; and the fourth and fifth, another pair, magnifying its dealings with the righteous. Perowne takes the eighth verse, which is distinguished by containing only one clause, as the kernel of the psalm, which is preceded by seven verses, constituting the first division, and followed by seven, making the second. But this arrangement, though tempting, wrenches ver. 9 from its kindred ver. 7.

Vv. 1–3 are in any case introductory. In form they are addressed to Jehovah, in thankful acknowledgment of the privilege and joy of praise. In reality they are a summons to men to taste its gladness, and to fill each day and brighten every night by music of thanksgiving. The devout heart feels that worship is "good," not only as being acceptable to God and conformable to man's highest duty, but as being the source of delight to the worshipper. Nothing is more characteristic of the Psalter than the joy which often dances and sings through its strains. Nothing affords a

surer test of the reality of worship than the worshipper's joy in it. With much significance and beauty, "Thy loving-kindness" is to be the theme of each morning, as we rise to a new day and find His mercy, radiant as the fresh sunshine, waiting to bless our eyes, and "Thy faithfulness" is to be sung in the night seasons, as we part from another day which has witnessed to His fulfilment of all His promises.

The second strophe contains the reason for praise—namely, the greatness and depth of the Divine works and purposes. The works meant are, as is obvious from the whole strain of the psalm, those of God's government of the world. The theme which exercised earlier psalmists reappears here, but the struggles of faith with unbelief, which are so profoundly and pathetically recorded in Psalm lxxiii., are ended for this singer. He bows in trustful adoration before the greatness of the works and the unsearchable depth of the purpose of God which directs the works. The sequence of vv. 4–6 is noteworthy. The central place is occupied by ver. 5—a wondering and reverent exclamation, evoked by the very mysteries of Providence. On either side of it stand verses describing the contrasted impression made by these on devout and on gross minds. The psalmist and his fellows are "gladdened," though he cannot see to the utmost verge or deepest abyss of Works or Plans. What he does see is good; and if sight does not go down to the depths, it is because eyes are weak, not because these are less pellucid than the sunlit shallows. What gladdens the trustful soul, which is in sympathy with God, only bewilders the "brutish man"—*i.e.*, the man who, by immersing his faculties in sense, has descended to the animal level; and it is too grave and weighty

for the "fool," the man of incurable levity and self-conceit, to trouble himself to ponder. The eye sees what it is capable of seeing. A man's judgment of God's dealings depends on his relation to God and on the dispositions of his soul.

The sterner aspect of Providence is dealt with in the next strophe (vv. 7–9). Some recent signal destruction of evil-doers seems to be referred to. It exemplifies once more the old truth which another psalmist had sung (Psalm xxxvii. 2), that the prosperity of evil-doers is short-lived, like the blossoming herbage, and not only short-lived, but itself the occasion of their destruction. The apparent success of the wicked is as a pleasant slope that leads downwards. The quicker the blossoming, the sooner the petals fall. "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." As in the previous strophe the middle verse was central in idea as well as in place, so in this one. Ver. 8 states the great fact from which the overthrow of the wicked, which is declared in the verses before and after, results. God's eternal elevation above the Transitory and the Evil is not merely contrasted with these, but is assigned as the reason why what is evil is transitory. We might render "Thou, Jehovah, art high (lit. a height) for evermore," as, in effect, the LXX. and other old versions do; but the application of such an epithet to God is unexampled, and the rendering above is preferable. God's eternal exaltation "is the great pillar of the universe and of our faith" (Perowne). From it must one day result that all God's enemies shall perish, as the psalmist reiterates, with triumphant reduplication of the designation of the foes, as if he would make plain that the very name "God's enemies" contained a prophecy of their destruction. However closely

banded, they "shall be scattered." Evil may make conspiracies for a time, for common hatred of good brings discordant elements into strange fellowship, but in its real nature it is divisive, and, sooner or later, allies in wickedness become foes, and no two of them are left together. The only lasting human association is that which binds men to one another, because all are bound to God.

From the scattered fugitives the psalmist turns first to joyful contemplation of his own blessedness, and then to wider thoughts of the general well-being of all God's friends. The more personal references are comprised in the fourth strophe (vv. 10–12). The metaphor of the exalted horn expresses, as in Psalms lxxv. 10, lxxxix. 17, triumph or the vindication of the psalmist by his deliverance. Ver. 10*b* is very doubtful. The word usually rendered "I am anointed" is peculiar. Another view of the word takes it for an infinitive used as a noun, with the meaning "growing old," or, as Cheyne renders, "wasting strength." This translation ("my wasting strength with rich oil") is that of the LXX. and other ancient versions, and of Cheyne and Baethgen among moderns. If adopted, the verb must be understood as repeated from the preceding clause, and the slight incongruity thence arising can be lessened by giving a somewhat wider meaning to "exalted," such as "strengthen" or the like. The psalmist would then represent his deliverance as being like refreshing a failing old age, by anointing with fresh oil.

Thus triumphant and quickened, he expects to gaze on the downfall of his foes. He uses the same expression as is found in Psalm xci. 8, with a similar connotation of calm security, and possibly of satisfaction. There is no need for heightening his feelings into

"desire," as in the Authorised and Revised Versions. The next clause (ver. 11 *b*) "seems to have been expressly framed to correspond with the other; it occurs nowhere else in this sense" (Perowne). A less personal verse (ver. 12) forms the transition to the last strophe, which is concerned with the community of the righteous. Here the singular number is retained. By "the righteous" the psalmist does not exactly mean himself, but he blends his own individuality with that of the ideal character, so that he is both speaking of his own future and declaring a general truth. The wicked "spring like herbage" (ver. 7), but the righteous "spring like the palm." The point of comparison is apparently the gracefulness of the tree, which lifts its slender but upright stem, and is ever verdant and fruitful. The cedar in its massive strength, its undecaying vigour, and the broad shelves of its foliage, green among the snows of Lebanon, stands in strong contrast to the palm. Gracefulness is wedded to strength, and both are perennial in lives devoted to God and Right. Evil blooms quickly, and quickly dies. What is good lasts. One cedar outlives a hundred generations of the grass and flowers that encircle its steadfast feet.

The last part extends the thoughts of ver. 12 to all the righteous. It does not name them, for it is needless to do so. Imagery and reality are fused together in this strophe. It is questionable whether there were trees planted in the courts of the Temple; but the psalmist's thought is that the righteous will surely be found there, and that it is their native soil, in which rooted, they are permanent. The facts underlying the somewhat violent metaphor are that true righteousness is found only in the dwellers with God, that they who anchor themselves in Him, as a tree in

the earth, are both stayed on, and fed from, Him. The law of physical decay does not enfeeble all the powers of devout men, even while they are subject to it. As aged palm trees bear the heaviest clusters, so lives which are planted in and nourished from God know no term of their fruitfulness, and are full of sap and verdant, when lives that have shut themselves off from Him are like an old stump, gaunt and dry, fit only for firewood. Such lives are prolonged and made fruitful, as standing proofs that Jehovah is upright, rewarding all cleaving to Him and doing of His will, with conservation of strength, and ever-growing power to do His will.

Ver. 15 is a reminiscence of Deut. xxxii. 4. The last clause is probably to be taken in connection with the preceding, as by Cheyne ("And that in my Rock there is no unrighteousness"). But it may also be regarded as a final avowal of the psalmist's faith, the last result of his contemplations of the mysteries of Providence. These but drive him to cling close to Jehovah, as his sole refuge and his sure shelter, and to ring out *this* as the end which shall one day be manifest as the net result of Providence—that there is no least trace of unrighteousness in Him.

PSALM XCIII.

1 Jehovah is King, with majesty has He clothed Himself,
Jehovah has clothed Himself, has girded Himself with strength,
Yea, the world is set fast [that] it cannot be moved.
2 Fast is set Thy throne from of yore,
From eternity art Thou.

3 The streams, Jehovah, have lifted up,
The streams have lifted up their voice,
The streams lift up their tumult.
4 Above the voices of many waters,
Mighty [waters], ocean breakers,
Mightier is Jehovah on high.

5 Thy testimonies are utterly to be trusted:
Holiness fits Thy house,
Jehovah, for length of days.

THIS is the first of a group of psalms celebrating Jehovah as King. It is followed by one which somewhat interrupts the unity of subject in the group, but may be brought into connection with them by being regarded as hymning Jehovah's kingly and judicial providence, as manifested in the subjugation of rebels against His throne. The remaining members of the group (Psalms xcv.–c.) rise to a height of lyric exultation in meditating on the reign of Jehovah. Psalms xciii. and xciv. are followed by two (xcv : vi.) beginning with ringing calls for new songs to hail the new manifestation of Himself, by which Jehovah has, as it were, inaugurated a new stage in His visible reign on earth. Psalm xcvii. again breaks out into the joyful proclama-

tion "Jehovah is King," which is followed, as if by a chorus, with a repeated summons for a new song (Psalm xcviii.). Once more the proclamation "Jehovah is King" is sounded out in Psalm xcix., and then the group is closed by Psalm c., with its call to all lands to crowd round Jehovah's throne with "tumult of acclaim." Probably the historical fact underlying this new conviction of, and triumph in, the Kingdom of Jehovah is the return from exile. But the tone of prophetic anticipation in these exuberant hymns of confident joy can scarcely fail of recognition. The psalmists sang of an ideal state to which their most glorious experiences but remotely approximated. They saw "not yet all things put under Him," but they were sure that He is King, and they were as sure, though with the certitude of faith fixed on His word and not with that of sight, that His universal dominion would one day be universally recognised and rejoiced in.

This short psalm but strikes the keynote for the group. It is overture to the oratorio, prelude of the symphony. Jehovah's reign, the stability of His throne, the consequent fixity of the natural order, His supremacy over all noisy rage of opposition and lawlessness, either in Nature or among men, are set forth with magnificent energy and brevity. But the King of the world is not a mere Nature-compelling Jove. He has spoken to men, and the stability of the natural order but faintly shadows the firmness of His "testimonies," which are worthy of absolute reliance, and which make the souls that do rely on them stable as the firm earth, and steadfast with a steadfastness derived from Jehovah's throne. He not only reigns over, but dwells among, men, and His power keeps His dwelling-place inviolate, and lasting as His reign.

Ver. 1 describes an act rather than a state. "Jehovah has become King" by some specific manifestation of His sovereignty. Not as though He had not been King before, as ver. 2 immediately goes on to point out, but that He has shown the world, by a recent deed, the eternal truth that He reigns. His coronation has been by His own hands. No others have arrayed Him in His royal robes. The psalmist dwells with emphatic reiteration on the thought that Jehovah has clothed *Himself* with majesty and girded *Himself* with strength. All the stability of Nature is a consequence of His self-created and self-manifested power. That Strength holds a reeling world steady. The psalmist knew nothing about the fixity of natural law, but his thought goes down below that fixity, and finds its reason in the constant forth-putting of Divine power. Ver. 2 goes far back as well as deep down or high up, when it travels into the dim, unbounded past, and sees there, amidst its mists, one shining, solid substance, Jehovah's throne, which stood firm before every "then." The word rendered *from of yore* is literally "from then," as if to express the priority of that throne to every period of defined time. And even that grand thought can be capped by a grander climax: "From eternity art Thou." Therefore the world stands firm.

But there are things in the firm world that are not firm. There are "streams" or perhaps "floods," which seem to own no control, in their hoarse dash and devastating rush. The sea is ever the symbol of rebellious opposition and of ungoverned force. Here both the natural and symbolic meanings are present. And the picture is superbly painted. The sound of the blows of the breakers against the rocks, or as they clash with each other, is vividly repeated in the word

rendered "tumult," which means rather a blow or collision, and here seems to express the thud of the waves against an obstacle.

Ver. 4 is difficult to construe. The word rendered "mighty" is, according to the accentuation, attached to "breakers," but stands in an unusual position if it is to be so taken. It seems better to disregard the accents, and to take "mighty" as a second adjective belonging to "waters." These will then be described as both multitudinous and proud in their strength, while "ocean breakers" will stand in apposition to *waters*. Jehovah's might is compared with these. It would be but a poor measure of it to say that it was more than they; but the comparison means that He subdues the floods, and proves His power by taming and calming them. Evidently we are to see shining through the nature-picture Jehovah's triumphant subjugation of rebellious men, which is one manifestation of His kingly power. That dominion is not such as to make opposition impossible. Antagonism of the wildest sort neither casts doubt on its reality nor impinges a hair's-breadth on its sovereignty. All such futile rebellion will be subdued. The shriek of the storm, the dash of the breakers, will be hushed when He says "Peace," and the highest toss of their spray does not wet, much less shake, His stable throne. Such was the psalmist's faith as he looked out over a revolted world. Such may well be ours, who "hear a deeper voice across the storm."

That sweet closing verse comes by its very abruptness with singular impressiveness. We pass from wild commotion into calm. Jehovah speaks, and His words are witnesses both of what He is and of what men should and may be. Power is not an object for

trust to fasten on, unless it is gracious, and gives men account of its motives and ends. Words are not objects for trust to fasten on, unless they have power for fulfilment behind them. But if the King, who sets fast earth and bridles seas, speaks to us, we may utterly confide in His word, and, if we do, we shall share in His stable being, in so far as man is capable of resemblance to the changeless God. Trust in firm promises is the secret of firmness. Jehovah has not only given Israel His word, but His house, and His kingly power preserves His dwelling-place from wrong.

"Holiness" in ver. 5 expresses an attribute of Jehovah's house, not a quality of the worshippers therein. It cannot but be preserved from assault, since He dwells there. A king who cannot keep his own palace safe from invaders can have little power. If this psalm is, as it evidently is, post-exilic, how could the singer, remembering the destruction of the Temple, speak thus? Because he had learned the lesson of that destruction, that the earthly house in which Jehovah dwelt among men had ceased to be His, by reason of the sins of its frequenters. Therefore, it was "burned with fire." The profaned house is no longer Jehovah's, but, as Jesus said with strong emphasis on the first word, "*Your* house is left unto you desolate." The Kingship of Jehovah is proclaimed eloquently and tragically by the desolated shrine.

PSALM XCIV.

1 God of vengeances, Jehovah,
God of vengeances, shine forth.
2 Lift up Thyself, Judge of the earth,
Return recompense to the proud.

3 For how long, Jehovah, shall the wicked,
For how long shall the wicked exult?
4 They well out, they speak—arrogance,
They give themselves airs like princes—all these workers of iniquity.
5 Thy people, Jehovah, they crush in pieces,
And Thine inheritance they afflict.
6 Widow and stranger they kill,
And orphans they murder.

7 And they say, "Jah sees [it] not,
And the God of Jacob considers it not."
8 Consider, ye brutish among the people,
And ye fools, when will ye be wise?
9 The Planter of the ear, shall He not hear?
Or the Former of the eye, shall He not see?
10 The Instructor of the nations, shall He not punish,—
The Teacher of knowledge to man?
11 Jehovah knows the thoughts of men,
For they are [but] a breath.

12 Happy the man whom Thou instructest, Jehovah,
And teachest from Thy law,
13 To give him rest from the days of evil,
Till there be digged for the wicked a pit.
14 For Jehovah will not spurn away His people,
And His inheritance He will not forsake.
15 For to righteousness shall judgment return,
And after it shall all the upright in heart [follow].

16 Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers?
Who will set himself for me against the workers of iniquity?
17 Unless Jehovah had been a help for me,
My soul had soon dwelt in silence.
18 When I say, "My foot slips,"
Thy loving-kindness, Jehovah, stays me.
19 In the multitude of my divided thoughts within me,
Thy comforts delight my soul.

20 Can the throne of destruction be confederate with Thee,
Which frameth mischief by statute?
21 They come in troops against the soul of the righteous,
And innocent blood they condemn.
22 But Jehovah is to me a high tower,
And my God the rock of my refuge.
23 And He brings back upon them their iniquities,
And by their own evil will He root them out,
Jehovah our God will root them out.

THE theme of God the Judge is closely allied to that of God the King, as other psalms of this group show, in which His coming to judge the world is the subject of rapturous praise. This psalm hymns Jehovah's retributive sway, for which it passionately cries, and in which it confidently trusts. Israel is oppressed by insolent rulers, who have poisoned the fountains of justice, condemning the innocent, enacting unrighteous laws, and making a prey of all the helpless. These "judges of Sodom" are not foreign oppressors, for they are "among the people"; and even while they scoff at Jehovah's judgments they call Him by His covenant names of "Jah" and "God of Jacob." There is no need, therefore, to look beyond Israel for the originals of the dark picture, nor does it supply data for fixing the period of the psalm.

The structure and course of thought are transparent. First comes an invocation to God as the Judge of the earth (vv. 1, 2); then follow groups of four verses

each, subdivided into pairs,—the first of these (vv. 3–6) pictures the doings of the oppressors; the second (vv. 7–11) quotes their delusion that their crimes are unseen by Jehovah, and refutes their dream of impunity, and it is closed by a verse in excess of the normal number, emphatically asserting the truth which the mockers denied. The third group declares the blessedness of the men whom God teaches, and the certainty of His retribution to vindicate the cause of the righteous (vv. 12–15). Then follow the singer's own cry for help in his own need, as one of the oppressed community, and a sweet reminiscence of former aid, which calms his present anxieties. The concluding group goes back to description of the lawless law-makers and their doings, and ends with trust that the retribution prayed for in the first verses will verily be dealt out to them, and that thereby both the singer, as a member of the nation, and the community will find Jehovah, who is both "my God" and "our God," a high tower.

The reiterations in the first two verses are not oratorical embellishments, but reveal intense feeling and pressing need. It is a cold prayer which contents itself with one utterance. A man in straits continues to cry for help till it comes, or till he sees it coming. To this singer, the one aspect of Jehovah's reign which was forced on him by Israel's dismal circumstances was the judicial. There are times when no thought of God is so full of strength as that He is "the God of recompenses," as Jeremiah calls Him (li. 56), and when the longing of good men is that He would flash forth, and slay evil by the brightness of His coming. They who have no profound loathing of sin, or who have never felt the crushing weight of legalised wickedness, may shrink from such aspirations as the psalmist's, and

brand them as ferocious; but hearts longing for the triumph of righteousness will not take offence at them.

The first group (vv. 3–6) lifts the cry of suffering Faith, which has almost become impatience, but turns to, not from, God, and so checks complaints of His delay, and converts them into prayer. "How long, O Lord?" is the burden of many a tried heart; and the Seer heard it from the souls beneath the altar. This psalm passes quickly to dilate on the crimes of the rulers which forced out that prayer. The portrait has many points of likeness to that drawn in Psalm lxxiii. Here, as there, boastful speech and haughty carriage are made prominent, being put before even cruelty and oppression. "They well out, they speak—arrogance": both verbs have the same object. Insolent self-exaltation pours from the fountain of their pride in copious jets. "They give themselves airs like princes." The verb in this clause may mean *to say among themselves* or *to boast*, but is now usually regarded as meaning *to behave like a prince—i.e.*, to carry oneself insolently. Vain-glorious arrogance manifest in boasting speech and masterful demeanour characterises Eastern rulers, especially those who have risen from low origin. Every little village tyrant gave himself airs, as if he were a king; and the lower his rank, the greater his insolence. These oppressors were grinding the nation to powder, and what made their crime the darker was that it was Jehovah's people and inheritance which they thus harassed. Helplessness should be a passport to a ruler's care, but it had become a mark for murderous attack. Widow, stranger, and orphan are named as types of defencelessness.

Nothing in this strophe indicates that these oppressors are foreigners. Nor does the delusion that

Jehovah neither saw nor cared for their doings, which the next strophe (vv. 7–11) states and confutes, imply that they were so. Cheyne, indeed, adduces the name "God of Jacob," which is put into their mouths, as evidence that they are pictured as knowing Jehovah only as one among many tribal or national deities; but the name is too familiar upon the lips of Israelites, and its use by others is too conjectural, to allow of such a conclusion. Rather, the language derives its darkest shade from being used by Hebrews, who are thereby declaring themselves apostates from God as well as oppressors of His people. Their mad, practical atheism makes the psalmist blaze up in indignant rebuke and impetuous argumentation. He turns to them, and addresses them in rough, plain words, strangely contrasted with their arrogant utterances regarding themselves. They are "brutish" (cf. Psalm lxxiii. 22) and "fools." The psalmist, in his height of moral indignation, towers above these petty tyrants, and tells them home truths very profitable for such people, however dangerous to their utterer. There is no obligation to speak smooth words to rulers whose rule is injustice and their religion impiety. Ahab had his Elijah, and Herod his John Baptist. The succession has been continued through the ages.

Delitzsch and others, who take the oppressors to be foreigners, are obliged to suppose that the psalmist turns in ver. 8 to those Israelites who had been led to doubt God by the prosperity of the wicked; but there is nothing, except the exigencies of that mistaken supposition, to show that any others than the deniers of God's providence who have just been quoted are addressed as "among the people." Their denial was the more inexcusable, because they belonged to the

people whose history was one long proof that Jehovah did see and recompense evil. Two considerations are urged by the psalmist, who becomes for the moment a philosophical theologian, in confutation of the error in question. First, he argues that nothing can be in the effect which is not in the cause, that the Maker of men's eyes cannot be blind, nor the Planter of their ears deaf. The thought has wide applications. It hits the centre, in regard to many modern denials as well as in regard to these blunt, ancient ones. Can a universe plainly full of purpose have come from a purposeless source? Can finite persons have emerged from an impersonal Infinity? Have we not a right to argue upwards from man's make to God his maker, and to find in Him the archetype of all human capacity. We may mark that, as has been long ago observed, the psalm avoids gross anthropomorphism, and infers, not that the Creator of the ear has ears, but that He hears. As Jerome (quoted by Delitzsch) says, "Membra sustulit, efficientias dedit."

In ver. 10 a second argument is employed, which turns on the thought that God is the educator of mankind. That office of instructor cannot be carried out unless He is also their chastiser, when correction is needed. The psalmist looks beyonds the bounds of Israel, the recipient of special revelation (cf. ver. 12), and recognises, what seldom appears in the Old Testament, but is unquestionably there, the great thought that He is teaching all mankind by manifold ways, and especially by the law written in their hearts. Jewish particularism, the exaggeration into a lie of the truth of God's special revelation to Israel, came to forget or deny God's education of mankind. Alas that the same mistake was inherited by so many epochs of the Church!

The teaching of the strophe is gathered up in ver. 11, which exceeds the normal number of four verses in each group, and asserts strongly the conclusion for which the psalmist has been arguing. The rendering of *b* is, "For (not That) they (*i.e.* men) are but a breath." "The ground of the Omniscience which sees the thoughts of men through and through is profoundly laid in the vanity, *i.e.* the finiteness, of men, as the correlative of the Infiniteness of God" (Hupfeld).

In the strophe vv. 12–15, the psalmist turns from the oppressors to their victims, the meek of the earth, and changes his tone from fiery remonstrance to gracious consolation. The true point of view from which to regard the oppressors' wrong is to see in it part of God's educational processes. Jehovah, who "instructs" all men by conscience, "instructs" Israel, and by the Law "teaches" the right interpretation of such afflictive providences. Happy he who accepts that higher education! A further consolation lies in considering the purpose of the special revelation to Israel, which will be realised in patient hearts that are made wise thereby—namely, calm repose of submission and trust, which are not disturbed by any stormy weather. There is possible for the harassed man "peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation."

If we recognise that life is mainly educational, we shall neither be astonished nor disturbed by sorrows. It is not to be wondered at that the schoolmaster has a rod, and uses it sometimes. There is rest from evil even while in evil, if we understand the purpose of evil. Yet another consolation lies in the steadfast anticipation of its transiency and of the retribution measured to its doers. That is no unworthy source of comfort. And the ground on which it rests is

the impossibility of God's forsaking His people, His inheritance. These designations of Israel look back to ver. 5, where the crushed and afflicted are designated by the same words. Israel's relation to Jehovah made the calamities more startling; but it also makes their cessation, and retribution for them on their inflicters, more certain. It is the trial and triumph of Faith to be sure, while tyrants grind and crush, that Jehovah has not deserted their victims. He cannot change His purpose; therefore, sorrows and prosperity are but divergent methods, concurring in carrying out His unalterable design. The individual sufferer may take comfort from his belonging to the community to which the presence of Jehovah is guaranteed for ever. The singer puts his convictions as to what is to be the upshot of all the perplexed riddles of human affairs into epigrammatic form, in the obscure, gnome-like saying, "To righteousness shall judgment return," by which he seems to mean that the administration of justice, which at present was being trampled under foot, "shall come back to the eternal principle of all judicial action, namely, righteousness,"—in shorter words, there shall be no schism between the judgments of earthly tribunals and justice. The psalmist's hope is that of all good men and sufferers from unjust rulers. All the upright in heart long for such a state of things and follow after it, either in the sense of delight in it ("Dem Recht müssen alle frommen Herzen zufallen"—Luther), or of seeking to bring it about. The psalmist's hope is realised in the King of Men, whose own judgments are truth, and who infuses righteousness and the love of it into all who trust in Him.

The singer comes closer to his own experience in the next strophe (vv. 16–19), in which he claims his

share in these general sources of rest and patience, and thankfully thinks of past times, when he found that they yielded him streams in the desert. He looks out upon the multitude of "evil-doers," and, for a moment, asks the question which faithless sense is ever suggesting and pronouncing unanswerable: "Where shall I find a champion?" As long as our eyes range along the level of earth, they see none such. But the empty earth should turn our gaze to the occupied throne. There sits the Answer to our almost despairing question. Rather, there He stands, as the proto-martyr saw Him, risen to His feet in swift readiness to help His servant. Experience confirms the hope of Jehovah's aid; for unless in the past He had been the singer's help, he could not have lived till this hour, but must have gone down into the silent land. No man who still draws breath is without tokens of God's sufficient care and ever-present help. The mystery of continued life is a witness for God. And not only does the past thus proclaim where a man's help is, but devout reflection on it will bring to light many times when doubts and tremors were disappointed. Conscious weakness appeals to confirming strength. If we feel our foot giving, and fling up our hands towards Him, He will grasp them and steady us in the most slippery places. Therefore, when divided thoughts (for so the picturesque word employed in ver. 19 means) hesitate between hope and fear, God's consolations steal into agitated minds, and there is a great calm.

The last strophe (vv. 20–23) weaves together in the finale, as a musician does in the last bars of his composition, the main themes of the psalm—the evil deeds of unjust rulers, the trust of the psalmist, his confidence in the final annihilation of the oppressor's

and the consequent manifestation of God as the God of Israel. The height of crime is reached when rulers use the forms of justice as masks for injustice, and give legal sanction to "mischief." The ancient world groaned under such travesties of the sanctity of Law; and the modern world is not free from them. The question often tortures faithful hearts, "Can such doings be sanctioned by God, or in any way be allied to Him?" To the psalmist the worst part of these rulers' wickedness was that, in his doubting moments, it raised the terrible suspicion that God was perhaps on the side of the oppressors. But when such thoughts came surging on him, he fell back, as we all have to do, on personal experience and on an act of renewed trust. He remembered what God had been to him in past moments of peril, and he claimed Him for the same now, his own refuge and fortress. Strong in that individual experience and conviction, he won the confidence that all which Jehovah had to do with the throne of destruction was, not to connive at its evil, but to overthrow it and root out the evil-doers, whose own sin will be their ruin. Then Jehovah will be known, not only for the God who belongs to, and works for, the single soul, but who is "our God," the refuge of the community, who will not forsake His inheritance.

PSALM XCV.

1 Come, let us raise shrill cries of joy to Jehovah,
Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our Salvation.
2 Let us go to meet His face with thanksgiving,
With songs let us shout aloud to Him.
3 For Jehovah is a great God,
And a great King above all gods.
4 In whose hand are the deep places of the earth,
And the peaks of the mountains are His.
5 Whose is the sea, and He made it,
And the dry land His hands formed.

6 Come, let us worship and bow down,
Let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker,
7 For He is our God,
And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of
His hand.

To-day, if ye would listen to His voice,
8 Harden not your hearts, as [at] Meribah,
As [in] the day of Massah in the wilderness,
9 Where your fathers tempted Me,
Proved Me and saw My work.
10 Forty years loathed I [that] generation,
And said, "A people going astray in heart are they,
And they know not My ways."
11 So that I sware in My wrath,
"Surely they shall not come into My rest."

THIS psalm is obviously divided into two parts, but there is no reason for seeing in these two originally unconnected fragments. Rather does each part derive force from the other; and nothing is more natural than that, after the congregation has spoken its joyful summons to itself to worship, Jehovah should

speak warning words as to the requisite heart-preparation, without which worship is vain. The supposed fragments are fragmentary indeed, if considered apart. Surely a singer has the liberty of being abrupt and of suddenly changing his tone. Surely he may as well be credited with discerning the harmony of the change of key as some later compiler. There could be no more impressive way of teaching the conditions of acceptable worship than to set side by side a glad call to praise and a solemn warning against repeating the rebellions of the wilderness. These would be still more appropriate if this were a post-exilic hymn; for the second return from captivity would be felt to be the analogue of the first, and the dark story of former hard-heartedness would fit very close to present circumstances.

The invocation to praise in vv. 1, 2, gives a striking picture of the joyful tumult of the Temple worship. Shrill cries of gladness, loud shouts of praise, songs with musical accompaniments, rang simultaneously through the courts, and to Western ears would have sounded as din rather than as music, and as more exuberant than reverent. The spirit expressed is, alas! almost as strange to many moderns as the manner of its expression. That swelling joy which throbs in the summons, that consciousness that jubilation is a conspicuous element in worship, that effort to rise to a height of joyful emotion, are very foreign to much of our worship. And their absence, or presence only in minute amount, flattens much devotion, and robs the Church of one of its chief treasures. No doubt, there must often be sad strains blended with praise. But it is a part of Christian duty, and certainly of Christian wisdom, to try to catch that tone of joy in worship which rings in this psalm.

The three following verses (3–5) give Jehovah's creative and sustaining power, and His consequent ownership of this fair world, as the reasons for worship. He is King by right of creation. Surely it is forcing unnatural meanings on words to maintain that the psalmist believed in the real existence of the "gods" whom he disparagingly contrasts with Jehovah. The fact that these were worshipped sufficiently warrants the comparison. To treat it as in any degree inconsistent with Monotheism is unnecessary, and would scarcely have occurred to a reader but for the exigencies of a theory. The repeated reference to the "hand" of Jehovah is striking. In it are held the deeps; it is a plastic hand, "forming" the land, as a potter fashioning his clay; it is a shepherd's hand, protecting and feeding his flock (ver. 7). The same power created and sustains the physical universe, and guides and guards Israel. The psalmist has no time for details; he can only single out extremes, and leave us to infer that what is true of these is true of all that is enclosed between them. The depths and the heights are Jehovah's. The word rendered "peaks" is doubtful. Etymologically it should mean "fatigue," but it is not found in that sense in any of the places where it occurs. The parallelism requires the meaning of *heights* to contrast with *depths*, and this rendering is found in the LXX., and is adopted by most moderns. The word is then taken to come from a root meaning "to be high." Some of those who adopt the translation *summits* attempt to get that meaning out of the root meaning *fatigue*, by supposing that the labour of getting to the top of the mountain is alluded to in the name. Thus Kay renders "the mountains' toilsome heights," and so also Hengstenberg. But it is simpler to trace

the word to the other root, *to be high*. The ownerless sea is owned by Him; He made both its watery waste and the solid earth.

But that all-creating Hand has put forth more wondrous energies than those of which heights and depths, sea and land, witness. Therefore, the summons is again addressed to Israel to bow before "Jehovah our Maker." The creation of a people to serve Him is the work of His grace, and is a nobler effect of His power than material things. It is remarkable that the call to glad praise should be associated with thoughts of His greatness as shown in creation, while lowly reverence is enforced by remembrance of His special relation to Israel. We should have expected the converse. The revelation of God's love, in His work of creating a people for Himself, is most fittingly adored by spirits prostrate before Him. Another instance of apparent transposition of thoughts occurs in ver. *7 b*, where we might have expected "people of His hand and sheep of His pasture." Hupfeld proposes to correct accordingly, and Cheyne follows him. But the correction buys prosaic accuracy at the cost of losing the forcible incorrectness which blends figure and fact, and by keeping sight of both enhances each. "The sheep of His hand" suggests not merely the creative but the sustaining and protecting power of God. It is hallowed for ever by our Lord's words, which may be an echo of it: "No man is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

The sudden turn from jubilant praise and recognition of Israel's prerogative as its occasion to grave warning is made more impressive by its occurring in the middle of a verse. God's voice breaks in upon the joyful acclamations with solemn effect. The shouts of

the adoring multitude die on the poet's trembling ear, as that deeper Voice is heard. We cannot persuade ourselves that this magnificent transition, so weighty with instruction, so fine in poetic effect, is due to the after-thought of a compiler. Such an one would surely have stitched his fragments more neatly together than to make the seam run through the centre of a verse—an irregularity which would seem small to a singer in the heat of his inspiration. Ver. *7c* may be either a wish or the protasis to the apodosis in ver. 8. "If ye would but listen to His voice!" is an exclamation, made more forcible by the omission of what would happen then. But it is not necessary to regard the clause as optative. The conditional meaning, which connects it with what follows, is probably preferable, and is not set aside by the expression "His voice" instead of "My voice"; for "similar change of persons is very common in utterances of Jehovah, especially in the Prophets" (Hupfeld). "To-day" stands first with strong emphasis, to enforce the critical character of the present moment. It may be the last opportunity. At all events, it is an opportunity, and therefore to be grasped and used. A doleful history of unthankfulness lay behind; but still the Divine voice sounds, and still the fleeting moments offer space for softening of heart and docile hearkening. The madness of delay when time is hurrying on, and the longsuffering patience of God, are wonderfully proclaimed in that one word, which the Epistle to the Hebrews lays hold of, with so deep insight, as all-important.

The warning points Israel back to ancestral sins, the tempting of God in the second year of the Exodus, by the demand for water (Exod. xvii. 1–7). The scene of that murmuring received both names, Massah (tempta-

tion) and Meribah (strife). It is difficult to decide the exact force of ver. 9 *b*. "Saw My work" is most naturally taken as referring to the Divine acts of deliverance and protection seen by Israel in the desert, which aggravated the guilt of their faithlessness. But the word rendered "and" will, in that case, have to be taken as meaning "although"—a sense which cannot be established. It seems better, therefore, to take "work" in the unusual meaning of acts of judgment—His "strange work." Israel's tempting of God was the more indicative of hardheartedness that it was persisted in, in spite of chastisements. Possibly both thoughts are to be combined, and the whole varied stream of blessings and punishments is referred to in the wide expression. Both forms of God's work should have touched these hard hearts. It mattered not whether He blessed or punished. They were impervious to both. The awful issue of this obstinate rebellion is set forth in terrible words. The sensation of physical loathing followed by sickness is daringly ascribed to God. We cannot but remember what John heard in Patmos from the lips into which grace was poured: "I will spue thee out of My mouth."

But before He cast Israel out, He pled with them, as ver. 10 *b* goes on to tell: "He said, 'A people going astray in heart are they.'" He said so, by many a prophet and many a judgment, in order that they might come back to the true path. The desert-wanderings were but a symbol, as they were a consequence, of their wanderings in heart. They did not know His ways; therefore they chose their own. They strayed in heart; therefore they had an ever-increasing ignorance of the right road. For the averted heart and the blind understanding produce each other.

The issue of the long-protracted departure from the path which God had marked was, as it ever is, condemnation to continue in the pathless wilderness, and exclusion from the land of rest which God had promised them, and in which He Himself had said that He would make His resting-place in their midst. But what befell Israel in outward fact was symbolical of universal spiritual truth. The hearts that love devious ways can never be restful. The path which leads to calm is traced by God, and only those who tread it with softened hearts, earnestly listening to His voice, will find repose even on the road, and come at last to the land of peace. For others, they have chosen the desert, and in it they will wander wearily, "for ever roaming with a hungry heart."

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is laying hold of the very kernel of the psalm, when he adduces the fact that, so many centuries after Moses, the warning was still addressed to Israel, and the possibility of entering the Rest of God, and the danger of missing it, still urged, as showing that the Rest of God remained to be won by later generations, and proclaiming the eternal truth that "we which have believed do enter into rest."

PSALM XCVI.

1 Sing to Jehovah a new song,
Sing to Jehovah, all the earth.
2 Sing to Jehovah, bless His name,
Publish the glad tidings of His salvation from day to day.
3 Recount among the nations His glory,
Among all peoples His wonders.

4 For great is Jehovah, and to be praised exceedingly,
Dread is He above all gods.
5 For all the gods of the people are Nothings,
And Jehovah made the heavens.
6 Honour and majesty are before Him,
Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.

7 Give to Jehovah, ye families of the peoples,
Give to Jehovah glory and strength.
8 Give to Jehovah the glory of His name,
Take an offering and come into His courts.
9 Worship Jehovah in holy attire,
Tremble before Him, all the earth.

10 Say among the nations, "Jehovah is King,"
Yea, the world is set fast [that] it cannot be moved,
He shall deal judgment to the peoples in equity.
11 Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth exult,
Let the sea thunder and its fulness,
12 Let the plain rejoice and all that is in it,
Then shall all the trees of the forest ring out joyful cries,
13 Before Jehovah, for He comes,
He comes to judge the earth,
He will judge the world in righteousness,
And peoples in His faithfulness.

THE praise of Jehovah as King has, in the preceding psalms, chiefly celebrated His reign over Israel. But this grand coronation anthem takes a wider sweep, and hymns that kingdom as extending to all nations,

and as reaching beyond men, for the joy and blessing of a renovated earth. It falls into four strophes, of which the first three contain three verses each, while the last extends to four. These strophes are like concentric circles, drawn round that eternal throne. The first summons Israel to its high vocation of Jehovah's evangelist, the herald who proclaims the enthronement of the King. The second sets Him above all the "Nothings" which usurp the name of gods, and thus prepares the way for His sole monarchy. The third summons outlying nations to bring their homage, and flings open the Temple gates to all men, inviting them to put on priestly robes, and do priestly acts there. The fourth calls on Nature in its heights and depths, heaven and earth, sea, plain and forest, to add their acclaim to the shouts which hail the establishment of Jehovah's visible dominion.

The song is to be new, because a new manifestation of Jehovah's Kinghood has wakened once more the long-silent harps, which had been hung on the willows of Babylon. The psalm is probably a lyric echo of the Restoration, in which the prophet-singer sees the beginning of Jehovah's world-wide display of His dominion. He knew not how many weary years were to pass in a weary and God-defying world, before his raptures became facts. But though His vision tarries, His song is no over-heated imagining, which has been chilled down for succeeding generations into a baseless hope. The perspective of the world's chronology hid from him the deep valley between His standpoint and the fulfilment of his glowing words. Mankind still marches burdened, down among the mists, but it marches towards the sunlit heights. The call to sing a new song is quoted from Isa. xlii. 10. The word

in ver. 2 *b* rendered "publish glad tidings" is also a favourite word with Isaiah II. (xl. 9, lii. 7, etc.). Ver. 3 *a* closely resembles Isa. lxvi. 19.

The second strophe is full of allusions to earlier psalms and prophets. The new manifestation of Jehovah's power has vindicated His supremacy above the vanities which the peoples call gods, and has thereby given new force to old triumphant words which magnified His exalted name. Long ago a psalmist had sung, after a signal defeat of assailants of Jerusalem, that God was "great and greatly to be praised" (Psalm xlviii. 1), and this psalmist makes the old words new. "Dread" reminds us of Psalm xlvii. 2. The contemptuous name of the nations' gods as "Nothings" is frequent in Isaiah. The heavens, which roof over all the earth, declare to every land Jehovah's creative power, and His supremacy above all gods. But the singer's eye pierces their abysses, and sees some gleams of that higher sanctuary of which they are but the floor. There stand Honour and Majesty, Strength and Beauty. The psalmist does not speak of "attributes." His vivid imagination conceives of these as servants, attending on Jehovah's royal state. Whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever are august, are at home in that sanctuary. Strength and beauty are often separated in a disordered world, and each is maimed thereby, but, in their perfection, they are indissolubly blended. Men call many things strong and fair which have no affinity with holiness; but the archetypes of both excellences are in the Holy Place, and any strength which has not its roots there is weakness, and any beauty which is not a reflection from "the beauty of the Lord our God" is but a mask concealing ugliness.

The third strophe builds on this supremacy of Jehovah, whose dwelling-place is the seat of all things worthy to be admired, the summons to all nations to render praise to Him. It is mainly a variation of Psalm xxix. 1, 2, where the summons is addressed to angels. Here "the families of the peoples" are called on to ascribe to Jehovah "glory and strength," or "the glory of His name (*i.e.*, of His character as revealed). The call presupposes a new manifestation of His Kingship, as conspicuous and earth-shaking as the thunder-storm of the original psalm. As in it the "sons of God" were called to worship in priestly garb, so here, still more emphatically, Gentile nations are invited to assume the priestly office, to "take an offering and come into His courts." The issue of Jehovah's manifestation of kingly sway will be that Israel's prerogative of priestly access to Him will be extended to all men, and that the lowly worship of earth will have characteristics which assimilate it to that of the elder brethren who ever stand before Him, and also characteristics which distinguish it from that, and are necessary while the worshippers are housed in flesh. Material offerings and places consecrated to worship belong to earth. The "sons of God" above have them not, for they need them not.

The last strophe has four verses, instead of the normal three. The psalmist's chief purpose in it is to extend his summons for praise to the whole creation; but he cannot refrain from once more ringing out the glad tidings for which praise is to be rendered. He falls back in ver. 10 on Psalm xciii. 1, and Psalm ix. 8. In his quotation from the former psalm, he brings more closely together the thoughts of Jehovah's reign and the fixity of the world, whether that is taken with

a material reference, or as predicting the calm perpetuity of the moral order established by His merciful rule and equitable judgment. The thought that inanimate nature will share in the joy of renovated humanity inspires many glowing prophetic utterances, eminently those of Isaiah—as, *e.g.*, Isa. xxxv. The converse thought, that it shared in the consequences of man's sin, is deeply stamped on the Genesis narrative. The same note is struck with unhesitating force in Rom. viii., and elsewhere in the New Testament. A poet invests Nature with the hues of his own emotions, but this summons of the psalmist is more than poetry. How the transformation is to be effected is not revealed, but the consuming fires will refine, and at last man will have a dwelling-place where environment will correspond to character, where the external will image the inward state, where a new form of the material will be the perpetual ally of the spiritual, and perfected manhood will walk in a "new heaven and new earth, where dwelleth righteousness."

In the last verse of the psalm, the singer appears to extend his prophetic gaze from the immediate redeeming act by which Jehovah assumes royal majesty, to a still future "coming," in which He will judge the earth. "The accession is a single act; the judging is a continual process. Note that 'judging' has no terrible sound to a Hebrew" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). Ver. 13 *c* is again a verbatim quotation from Psalm ix. 8.

PSALM XCVII.

1 Jehovah is King, let the earth exult,
Let many lands be glad.
2 Cloud and deep darkness are round Him,
Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.
3 Fire goes before Him,
And devours His enemies round about.

4 His lightnings lighted up the world,
The earth saw and trembled.
5 Mountains melted like wax, from before the face of Jehovah,
From before the face of the Lord of the whole earth.
6 The heavens declared His righteousness,
And all the peoples saw His glory.

7 Shamed are all they who serve graven images,
Who boast themselves of the Nothings,
Worship Him, all ye gods!
8 Zion heard and was glad,
And the daughters of Judah exulted,
Because of Thy judgments, Jehovah.
9 For Thou, Jehovah, art most high above all the earth,
Thou art exceedingly exalted above all gods.

10 Ye who love Jehovah, hate evil;
He keeps the souls of His favoured ones,
From the hand of the wicked He delivers them.
11 Light is sown for the righteous man,
And for the upright-hearted, gladness.
12 Be glad, ye righteous, in Jehovah,
And give thanks to His holy memorial.

THE summons to praise the King with a new song (Psalm xcvi.) is followed by this psalm, which repeats the dominant idea of the group, "Jehovah is

King," but from a fresh point of view. It represents His rule under the form of a theophany, which may possibly be regarded as the fuller description of that coming of Jehovah to judgment with which Psalm xcvi. closes. The structure of both psalms is the same, each being divided into four strophes, normally consisting of three verses each, though the last strophe of Psalm xcvi. runs over into four verses. In this psalm, the first group of verses celebrates the royal state of the King (vv. 1–3); the second describes His coming as a past fact (vv. 4–6); the third portrays the twofold effects of Jehovah's appearance on the heathen and on Zion (vv. 7–9); and the last applies the lessons of the whole to the righteous, in exhortation and encouragement (vv. 10–12). The same dependence on earlier psalms and prophets which marks others of this group is obvious here. The psalmist's mind is saturated with old sayings, which he finds flashed up into new meaning by recent experiences. He is not "original," and does not try to be so; but he has drunk in the spirit of his predecessors, and words which to others were antiquated and cold blaze with light for him, and seem made for his lips. He who reads aright the solemn significance of to-day will find it no less sacred than any past, and may transfer to it all which seers and singers have said and sung of Jehovah's presence of old.

The first strophe is mosaic-work. Ver. 1 (*lands=isles*) may be compared with Isa. xlii. 10, li. 5. Ver. 2 *a* is from Exod. xix. 9, 16, etc., and Psalm xviii. 9. Ver. 2 *b* is quoted from Psalm lxxxix. 14. Ver. 3 *a* recalls Psalms l. 3 and xviii. 8. The appearance of God on Sinai is the type of all later theophanies, and the reproduction of its principal features witnesses to the

conviction that that transient manifestation was the unveiling of permanent reality. The veil had dropped again, but what had been once seen continued always, though unseen; and the veil could and would be drawn aside, and the long-hidden splendour blaze forth again. The combination of the pieces of mosaic in a new pattern here is striking. Three thoughts fill the singer's mind. God is King, and His reign gladdens the world, even away out to the dimly seen lands that are washed by the western ocean. "The islands" drew Isaiah's gaze. Prophecy began in him to look seawards and westwards, little knowing how the course of empire was to take its way thither, but feeling that whatever lands might lie towards the setting sun were ruled, and would be gladdened, by Jehovah.

Gladness passes into awe in ver. 2 *a*, as the seer beholds the cloud and gloom which encircle the throne. The transcending infinitude of the Divine nature, the mystery of much of the Divine acts, are symbolised by these; but the curtain is the picture. To know that God cannot be known is a large part of the knowledge of Him. Faith, built on experience, enters into the cloud, and is not afraid, but confidently tells what it knows to be within the darkness. "Righteousness and judgment"—the eternal principle and the activity thereof in the several acts of the King—are the bases of His throne, more solid than the covering cloud. Earth can rejoice in His reign, even though darkness may make parts of it painful riddles, if the assurance is held fast that absolute righteousness is at the centre, and that the solid core of all is judgment. Destructive power, symbolised in ver. 3 by fire which devours His adversaries, the fire which flashed first on Sinai, is part of the reason for the gladness of earth in His

reign. For His foes are the world's foes too; and a God who could not smite into nothingness that which lifted itself against His dominion would be no God for whom the isles could wait. These three characteristics, mystery, righteousness, power to consume, attach to Jehovah's royalty, and should make every heart rejoice.

In the second strophe, the tenses suddenly change into pure narative. The change may be simply due, as Cheyne suggests, to the influence of the earlier passages descriptive of theophanies, and in which the same tense occurs; but more probably it points to some event fresh in the experience of Israel, such as the return from Babylon. In this strophe again, we have mosaic. Ver. 4 *a* is quoted from Psalm lxxvii. 18. With ver. 4 *b* may be compared Psalm lxxvii. 16. Ver. 5 *a* is like Micah i. 4, and, in a less degree, Psalm lxviii. 2. "The Lord of the whole earth" is an unusual designation, first found in a significant connection in Josh. iii. 11, 13, as emphasising His triumph over heathen gods, in leading the people into Canaan, and afterwards found in Zech. iv. 14, vi. 5, and Micah iv. 13. Ver. 6 *a* comes from the theophany in Psalm l. 6; and ver. 6 *b* has parallels in both parts of Isaiah—*e.g.*, Isa. xxxv. 2, xl. 5, lii. 10—passages which refer to the restoration from Babylon. The picture is grand as a piece of word-painting. The world lies wrapped in thunder-gloom, and is suddenly illumined by the fierce blaze of lightning. The awestruck silence of Nature is wonderfully given by ver. 4 *b*: "The earth saw and trembled." But the picture is symbol, and the lightning-flash is meant to set forth the sudden, swift forth-darting of God's delivering power, which awes a gazing world, while the hills melting like wax from before His face solemnly

proclaim how terrible its radiance is, and how easily the mere showing of Himself annihilates all high things that oppose themselves. Solid-seeming and august powers, which tower above His people's ability to overcome them, vanish when He looks out from the deep darkness. The end of His appearance and of the consequent removal of obstacles is the manifestation of His righteousness and glory. The heavens are the scene of the Divine appearance, though earth is the theatre of its working. They "declare His righteousness," not because, as in Psalm xix. they are said to tell forth His glory by their myriad lights, but because in them He has shone forth, in His great act of deliverance of His oppressed people. Israel receives the primary blessing, but is blessed, not for itself alone, but that all peoples may see in it Jehovah's glory. Thus once more the psalm recognises the world-wide destination of national mercies, and Israel's place in the Divine economy as being of universal significance.

The third strophe (vv. 7–9) sets forth the results of the theophany on foes and friends. The worshippers of "the Nothings" (xcvi. 5) are put to confusion by the demonstration by fact of Jehovah's sovereignty over their helpless deities. Ver. 7 *a*, *b*, recall Isa. xlii. 17, xliv. 9. As the worshippers are ashamed, so the gods themselves are summoned to fall down before this triumphant Jehovah, as Dagon did before the Ark. Surely it is a piece of most prosaic pedantry to argue, from this flash of scorn, that the psalmist believed that the gods whom he had just called "Nothings" had a real existence, and that therefore he was not a pure Monotheist.

The shame of the idolaters and the prostration of their gods heighten the gladness of Zion, which the

psalm describes in old words that had once celebrated another flashing forth of Jehovah's power (Psalm xlviii. 11). Hupfeld, whom Cheyne follows, would transpose vv. 7 and 8, on the grounds that "the transposition explains what Zion heard, and brings the summons to the false gods into connection with the emphatic claim on behalf of Jehovah in ver. 9." But there is no need for the change, since there is no ambiguity as to what Zion heard, if the existing order is retained, and her gladness is quite as worthy a consequence of the exaltation of Jehovah in ver. 9 as the subjugation of the false gods would be. With ver. 9 compare Psalm lxxxiii. 18, and Psalm xlvii. 2.

The last strophe (vv. 10–12) draws exhortation and promises from the preceding. There is a marked diminution of dependence on earlier passages in this strophe, in which the psalmist points for his own generation the lessons of the great deliverance which he has been celebrating. Ver. 12 *a* is like Psalm xxxii. 11; ver. 12 *b* is from Psalm xxx. 4; but the remainder is the psalmist's own earnest exhortation and firm faith, cast into words which come warm from his own heart's depths. Love to Jehovah necessarily implies hatred of evil, which is His antagonist, and which He hates. That higher love will not be kept in energy, unless it is guarded by wholesome antipathy to everything foul. The capacity for love of the noble is maimed unless there is hearty hatred of the ignoble. Love to God is no idle affection, but withdraws a man from rival loves. The stronger the attraction, the stronger the recoil. The closer we cleave to God, the more decided our shrinking from all that would weaken our hold of Him. A specific reference in the exhortation to temptations to idolatry is possible, though not necessary. All times

have their "evil," with which God's lovers are ever tempted to comply. The exhortation is never out of place, nor the encouragement which accompanies it ever illusory. In such firm adherence to Jehovah, many difficulties will rise, and foes be made; but those who obey it will not lack protection. Mark the alternation of names for such. They are first called "lovers of God"; they are then designated as His "favoured ones." That which is first in time is last in mention. The effect is in view before it is traced to its cause. "We love Him because He first loved us." Then follow names drawn from the moral perfecting which will ensue on recognition and reception of God's favour, and on the cherishing of the love which fulfils the law. They who love because they are loved, become righteous and upright-hearted because they love. For such the psalmist has promise as well as exhortation. Not only are they preserved in and from dangers, but "light is sown" for them. Many commentators think that the figure of light being sown, as seeds are buried in the ground to shoot up in beauty in a future spring-time, is too violent, and they propose to understand "sown" in the sense of *scattered on*, not *deposited in*, the earth, "so that he, the righteous, goes forward step by step in the light" (Delitzsch). Others would correct into "is risen" or "arises." But one is reluctant to part with the figure, the violence of which is permissible in an Eastern singer. Darkness often wraps the righteous, and it is not true to experience to say that his way is always in the sunlight. But it is consolation to know that light is sown, invisible and buried, as it were, but sure to germinate and fruit. The metaphor mingles figures and offends purists, but it fits closer to fact than the weakening of it which fits the rules of composition.

If we are God's lovers, present darkness may be quieted by hope, and we may have the "fruit of the light" in our lives now, and the expectation of a time when we shall possess in fulness and in perpetuity all that light of knowledge, purity, and gladness which Jesus the Sower went forth to sow, and which had been ripened by struggles and sorrows and hatred of evil while we were here.

Therefore, because of this magnificent theophany, and because of its blessed consequences for loving souls, the psalmist ends with the exhortation to the righteous to rejoice. He began with bidding the world be glad. He now bids each of us concentrate that universal gladness in our own hearts. Whether earth obeys Him or not, it is for us to clasp firmly the great facts which will feed the lamp of our joy. God's holy memorial is His name, or His self-revealed character. He desires to be known and remembered by His acts. If we rightly retain and ponder His utterance of Himself, not in syllables, but in deeds, we shall not be silent in His praise. The righteous man should not be harsh and crabbed, but his soul should dwell in a serene atmosphere of joy in Jehovah, and his life be one thanksgiving to that mighty, never-to-be-forgotten Name.

PSALM XCVIII.

1 Sing to Jehovah a new song,
For wonders He has done,
His right hand has brought Him salvation, and His holy arm
2 Jehovah has made known His salvation,
To the eyes of the nations He has revealed His righteousness.
3 He has remembered His loving-kindness and His faithfulness
to the house of Israel,
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

4 Shout aloud to Jehovah, all the earth,
Break forth into shrill cries of joy and make melody,
5 Make melody to Jehovah with the lyre,
With lyre and voice of melody.
6 With trumpets and blast of horn,
Shout aloud before Jehovah, the King.

7 Let the sea thunder and its fulness,
The world and the dwellers therein,
8 Let streams clap hands,
Together let mountains ring out joyful cries,
9 Before Jehovah, for He comes to judge the earth,
He will judge the world in righteousness,
And peoples in equity.

THE two preceding psalms correspond in number and division of verses. The first begins with a summons to sing to Jehovah; the second, with a proclamation that He is King. A precisely similar connection exists between this and the following psalm. Psalm xcviii. is an echo of Psalm xcvi., and Psalm xcix. of Psalm xcvii. The number of verses in each of the second pair is nine, and in each there is a threefold division. The general theme of both pairs is the same, but with considerable modifications. The abundant

allusions to older passages continue here, and the second part of Isaiah is especially familiar to the singer.

The first strophe (vv. 1–3), though modelled on the first of Psalm xcvi., presents the theme in a different fashion. Instead of reiterating through three verses the summons to Israel to praise Jehovah, and declare His glory to the nations, this psalm passes at once from the summons to praise, in order to set forth the Divine deed which evokes the praise, and which, the psalmist thinks, will shine by its own lustre to "the ends of the earth," whether it has human voices to celebrate it or not. This psalmist speaks more definitely of Jehovah's wonders of deliverance. Israel appears rather as the recipient than as the celebrator of God's loving-kindness. The sun shines to all nations, whether any voices say "Look," or no. Ver. 1 *a* is from Psalm xcvi. 1; vv. 1 *c*–3 weave together snatches of various passages in the second part of Isaiah, especially Isa. lii. 10, lix. 16, lxiii. 5. The remarkable expression "brought salvation to Him" (from the second passage in Isaiah) is rendered by many "helped Him," and that rendering gives the sense but obliterates the connection with "salvation," emphatically repeated in the two following verses. The return from Babylon is naturally suggested as best corresponding to the psalmist's words. That was "the salvation of our God," who seemed to have forgotten His people, as Isa. xlix. 2 represents Israel as complaining, but now, before "the eyes of all nations," has shown how well He remembers and faithfully keeps His covenant obligations. Israel is, indeed, Jehovah's witness, and should ring out her grateful joy; but Jehovah's deed speaks more loudly than Israel's proclamation of it can ever do.

The second strophe (vv. 4–6) corresponds to the

third of Psalm xcvi.; but whereas there the Gentiles were summoned to bring offerings into the courts of Jehovah, here it is rather the glad tumult of vocal praise, mingled with the twang of harps, and the blare of trumpets and horns, which is present to the singer's imagination. He hears the swelling chorus echoing through the courts, which are conceived as wide enough to hold "all the earth." He has some inkling of the great thought that the upshot of God's redeeming self-manifestation will be glad music from a redeemed world. His call to mankind throbs with emotion, and sounds like a prelude to the melodious commingling of voice and instrument which he at once enjoins and foretells. His words are largely echoes of Isaiah. Compare Isa. xliv. 23, xlix. 13, lii. 9, for "break forth into," and li. 3 for "voice of melody."

The final strophe is almost identical with that of Psalm xcvi., but, in accordance with the variation found in vv. 1–3, omits the summons to Israel to proclaim God's Kinghood among the nations. It also inverts the order of clauses in ver. 7, and in ver. 7 *b* quotes from Psalm xxiv. 1, where also "the fulness of it" precedes, with the result of having no verb expressed which suits the nouns, since "the world and the dwellers therein" cannot well be called on to "thunder." Instead of the "plain" and "trees of the forest" in the original, ver. 8 substitutes streams and mountains. The bold figure of the streams clapping hands, in token of homage to the King (2 Kings xi. 12; Psalm xlvii. 1) occurs in Isa. lv. 12. The meeting waves are conceived of as striking against each other, with a sound resembling that of applauding palms. Ver. 9 is quoted from Psalm xcvi., with the omission of the second "He cometh" (which many versions of the LXX. retain), and the substitution of "equity" for "His faithfulness."

PSALM XCIX.

1 Jehovah is King—the peoples tremble;
Throned [on] the cherubim—the earth totters.
2 Jehovah in Zion is great,
And exalted above all the peoples.
3 Let them praise Thy great and dread name,
Holy is He.

4 And the strength of the King loves judgment,
Thou, Thou hast established equity,
Judgment and righteousness in Jacob hast Thou wrought.
5 Exalt Jehovah our God,
And prostrate yourselves at His footstool,
Holy is He.

6 Moses and Aaron among His priests,
And Samuel among them that call [on] His name;
They called on Jehovah, and He, He answered them.
7 In a pillar of cloud He spoke to them,
They kept His testimonies,
And the statute [which] He gave them.
8 Jehovah our God! Thou, Thou didst answer them,
A forgiving God wast Thou unto them,
And executing retribution for their deeds.
9 Exalt Jehovah our God,
And prostrate yourselves at His holy mountain,
For holy is Jehovah our God.

DELITZSCH has well called this psalm "an earthly echo of the seraphic Trisagion," the threefold proclamation of the Divine holiness, which Isaiah heard (Isa. vi. 3). It is, as already noted, a pendant to Psalm xcviii., but is distinguished from the other psalms of this group by its greater originality,

the absence of distinct allusion to the great act of deliverance celebrated in them, and its absorption in the one thought of the Divine holiness. Their theme is the event by which Jehovah manifested to the world His sovereign rule; this psalm passes beyond the event, and grasps the eternal central principle of that rule—namely, holiness. The same thought has been touched on in the other members of the group, but here it is the single subject of praise. Its exhibition in God's dealings with Israel is here traced in ancient examples, rather than in recent instances; but the view-point of the other psalms is retained, in so far as the Divine dealings with Israel are regarded as the occasion for the world's praise.

The first strophe (vv. 1–3) dwells in general terms on Jehovah's holiness, by which august conception is meant, not only moral purity, but separation from, by elevation above, the finite and imperfect. Ver. 1 vividly paints in each clause the glory reigning in heaven, and its effect on an awestruck world. We might render the verbs in the second part of each clause as futures or as optatives (*shall tremble, shall totter*, or *Let peoples tremble*, etc.), but the thought is more animated if they are taken as describing the result of the theophany. The participial clause "throned on the cherubim" adds detail to the picture of Jehovah as King. It should not, strictly speaking, be rendered with a finite verb. When that vision of Him sitting in royal state is unveiled, all people are touched with reverence, and the solid earth staggers. But the glory which is made visible to all men has its earthly seat in Zion, and shines from thence into all lands. It is by His deeds in Israel that God's exaltation is made known. The psalmist does not call on men to

bow before a veiled Majesty, of which they only know that it is free from all creatural limitations, lowliness and imperfections; but before a God, who has revealed Himself in acts, and has thereby made Himself a name. "Great and dread" is that name, but it is a sign of His loving-kindness that it is known by men, and thanksgiving, not dumb trembling, befits men who know it. The refrain might be rendered "It is holy," referring to the name, but vv. 5 and 9 make the rendering *Holy is He* more probable. The meaning is unaffected whichever translation is adopted.

Jehovah is holy, not only because lifted above and separated from creatural limitations, but because of His righteousness. The second strophe therefore proclaims that all His dominion is based on uprightness, and is a continual passing of that into acts of "judgment and righteousness." The "And" at the beginning of ver. 4, following the refrain, is singular, and has led many commentators to link the words with ver. 3 *a*, and, taking the refrain as parenthetical, to render, "Let them give thanks to Thy great and dread name, [for it is holy], and [to] the strength of the King [who] loveth," etc. But the presence of the refrain is an insuperable bar to this rendering. Others, as Delitzsch and Cheyne, regard "the strength of the king" as dependent on "established" in ver. 4 *b*, and suppose that the theocratic monarch of Israel is represented as under Jehovah's protection, if he reigns righteously. But surely one King only is spoken of in this psalm, and it is the inmost principle and outward acts of His rule which are stated as the psalmist's reason for summoning men to prostrate themselves at His footstool. The "And" at the beginning of the strophe links its whole thought with that of the preceding,

and declares eloquently how closely knit together are Jehovah's exaltation and His righteousness. The singer is in haste to assert the essentially moral character of infinite power. Delitzsch thinks that love cannot be predicated of "strength," but only of the possessor of strength; but surely that is applying the measuring line of prosaic accuracy to lyric fervour. The intertwining of Divine power and righteousness could not be more strongly asserted than by that very intelligible attribution to His power of the emotion of love, impelling it ever to seek union with uprightness. He is no arbitrary ruler. His reign is for the furtherance of justice. Its basis is "equity," and its separate acts are "judgment and righteousness." These have been done in and for Jacob. Therefore the call to worship rings out again. It is addressed to an undefined multitude, which, as the tone of all this group of psalms leads us to suppose, includes the whole race of man. They are summoned to lift high the praise of Him who in Himself is so high, and to cast themselves low in prostrate adoration at His footstool—*i.e.*, at His sanctuary on Zion (ver. 9). Thus again, in the centre strophe of this psalm, as in Psalms xcvi. and xcviii., mankind are called to praise the God who has revealed Himself in Israel; but while in the former of these two psalms worship was represented as sacrificial, and in the second as loud music of voice and instrument, here silent prostration is the fitting praise of the holiness of the infinitely exalted Jehovah.

The third strophe turns to examples drawn from the great ones of old, which at once encourage to worship and teach the true nature of worship, while they also set in clear light Jehovah's holiness in dealing with His worshippers. Priestly functions were exercised by

Moses, as in sprinkling the blood of the covenant (Exod. xxiv.), and in the ceremonial connected with the consecration of Aaron and his sons (Lev. viii.), as well as at the first celebration of worship in the Tabernacle (Exod. xl. 18 *sqq.*). In the wider sense of the word *priest*, he acted as mediator and intercessor, as in Exod. xvii. 12, in the fight against Amalek, and xxxii. 30–32, after the worship of the golden calf. Samuel, too, interceded for Israel after their seeking a king (1 Sam. xii. 19 *sqq.*), and offered sacrifices (1 Sam. vii. 9). Jeremiah couples them together as intercessors with God (xv. 1).

From these venerable examples the psalmist draws instruction as to the nature of the worship befitting the holiness of Jehovah. He goes deeper than all sacrifices, or than silent awe. To call on God is the best adoration. The cry of a soul, conscious of emptiness and need, and convinced of His fulness and of the love which is the soul of His power, is never in vain. "They called, and He"—even He in all the unreachable separation of His loftiness from their lowliness—"answered them." There is a commerce of desire and bestowal between the holy Jehovah and us. But these answers come on certain conditions, which are plain consequences of His holiness—namely, that His worshippers should keep His testimonies, by which He has witnessed both to His own character and to their duty. The psalmist seems to lose sight of his special examples, and to extend his view to the whole people, when he speaks of answers from the pillar of cloud, which cannot apply to Samuel's experience. The persons spoken of in ver. 8 as receiving answers may indeed be Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, all of whom were punished for evil deeds, as well as answered when

they cried; but more probably they are the whole community. The great principle, firmly grasped and clearly proclaimed by the singer, is that a holy God is a forgiving God, willing to hearken to men's cry, and rich to answer with needed gifts, and that indissolubly interwoven with the pardon, which He in His holiness gives, is retribution for evil. God loves too well to grant impunity. Forgiveness is something far better than escape from penalties. It cannot be worthy of God to bestow or salutary for men to receive, unless it is accompanied with such retribution as may show the pardoned man how deadly his sin was. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" is a law not abrogated by forgiveness. The worst penalty of sin, indeed—namely, separation from God—is wholly turned aside by repentance and forgiveness; but for the most part the penalties which are inflicted on earth, and which are the natural results of sin, whether in character, memory, habit, or circumstances, are not removed by pardon. Their character is changed; they become loving chastisement for our profit.

Such, then, is the worship which all men are invited to render to the holy Jehovah. Prostrate awe should pass into the cry of need, desire, and aspiration. It will be heard, if it is verified as real by obedience to God's known will. The answers will be fresh witnesses of God's holiness, which declares itself equally in forgiveness and in retribution. Therefore, once more the clear summons to all mankind rings out, and once more the proclamation of His holiness is made.

There is joyful confidence of access to the Inaccessible in the reiteration in ver. 9 of *Jehovah our God*. "Holy is He," sang the psalmist at first, but all the gulf between Jehovah and us is bridged over

when to the name which emphasises the eternal, self-existent being of the holy One we can add "our God." Then humble prostration is reconcilable with confident approach; and His worshippers have not only to lie lowly at His footstool, but to draw near, with children's frankness, to His heart.

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PSALM C.

1 Shout aloud to Jehovah, all the earth.
2 Serve Jehovah with gladness,
Come before His face with joyful cry.
3 Know ye that Jehovah He is God,
He, He has made us, and His are we,
His people and the sheep of His pasture.
4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving,
His courts with praise,
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
5 For Jehovah is good, for ever endures His loving-kindness,
And to generation after generation His faithfulness.

THE Psalms of the King end with this full-toned call to all the earth to do Him homage. It differs from the others of the group, by making no distinct mention either of Jehovah's royal title or of the great act of deliverance which was His visible exercise of sovereignty. But it resembles them in its jubilant tone, its urgent invitation to all men to walk in the light which shone on Israel, and its conviction that the mercies shown to the nation had blessing in them for all the world. The structure is simple. A call to praise Jehovah is twice given, and each is followed by reasons for His praise, which is grounded, in the first instance (ver. 3), on His dealings with Israel, and, in the second, on His character as revealed by all His works.

Ver. 1 consists of but a single clause, and, as Delitzsch says, is like the signal-blast of a trumpet. It rings out a summons to "all the earth," as in Psalm xcviii. 4, which is expanded in ver. 2. The service

there enjoined is that of worship in the Temple, as in ver. 4. Thus, the characteristic tone of this group of psalms echoes here, in its close, and all men are called and welcomed to the Sanctuary. There is no more a Court of the Gentiles. Not less striking than the universality of the psalm is its pulsating gladness. The depths of sorrow, both of that which springs from outward calamities and of that more heart-breaking sort which wells up from dark fountains in the soul, have been sounded in many a psalm. But the Psalter would not reflect all the moods of the devout soul, unless it had some strains of unmingled joy. The Christian Year has perfect days of sunlit splendour, when all the winds are still, and no cloud darkens the unbroken blue. There is no music without passages in minor keys; but joy has its rights and place too, and they know but little of the highest kind of worship who do not sometimes feel their hearts swell with gladness more poignant and exuberant than earth can minister.

The reason for the world's gladness is given in ver. 3. It is Jehovah's special relation to Israel. So far as the language of the verse is concerned, it depends on Psalm xcv. 7. "He hath made us" does not refer to creation, but to the constituting of Israel the people of God. "We are His" is the reading of the Hebrew margin, and is evidently to be preferred to that of the text, "Not we ourselves." The difference in Hebrew is only in one letter, and the pronunciation of both readings would be the same. Jewish text-critics count fifteen passages, in which a similar mistake has been made in the text. Here, the comparison of Psalm xcv. and the connection with the next clause of ver. 3 are decidedly in favour of the amended reading. It is to be observed that this is the only place in the psalm in

which "we" and "us" are used; and it is natural to lay stress on the opposition between "ye" in ver. 3 *a*, and "we" and "us" in *b*. The collective Israel speaks, and calls all men to rejoice in Jehovah, because of His grace to it. The psalm is, then, not, as Cheyne calls it, "a national song of thanksgiving, with which an universalistic element is not completely fused," but a song which starts from national blessings, and discerns in them a message of hope and joy for all men. Israel was meant to be a sacred hearth on which a fire was kindled, that was to warm all the house. God revealed Himself *in* Israel, but *to* the world.

The call to praise is repeated in ver. 4 with more distinct reference to the open Temple gates into which all the nations may now enter. The psalmist sees, in prophetic hope, crowds pouring in with glad alacrity through the portals, and then hears the joyful tumult of their many voices rising in a melodious surge of praise. His eager desire and large-hearted confidence that so it will one day be are vividly expressed by the fourfold call in ver. 4. And the reason which should draw all men to bless God's revealed character is that His self-revelation, whether to Israel or to others, shows that the basis of that character is goodness—*i.e.*, kindness or love—and that, as older singers have sung, "His loving-kindness endures for ever," and, as a thousand generations in Israel and throughout the earth have proved, His faithful adherence to His word, and discharge of all obligations under which He has come to His creatures, give a basis for trust and a perpetual theme for joyful thanksgiving. Therefore, all the world has an interest in Jehovah's royalty, and should, and one day shall, compass His throne with joyful homage, and obey His behests with willing service.

PSALM CI.

1 Of loving-kindness and judgment will I sing,
To Thee, Jehovah, will I harp.
2 I will give heed to the way of perfectness,
When wilt Thou come to me?
I will walk with a perfect heart
Within my house.
3 I will not set before my eyes any villainous thing,
The doing of transgressions do I hate,
It shall not cleave to me.
4 A perverse heart shall depart from me,
Evil will I not know.

5 The secret slanderer of his neighbour,
Him will I root out,
The lofty-eyed and proud-hearted,
Him will I not endure.
6 My eyes are on the faithful of the land,
That they may dwell with me,
He who walks in the way of perfectness,
He shall serve me.
7 He shall not dwell in my house
Who practises deceit,
He that speaks lies
Shall not be established before my eyes.
8 Every morning will I root out
All the wicked of the land,
To cut off from the city of Jehovah
All workers of iniquity.

THE contents of this psalm go far towards confirming the correctness of the superscription in ascribing it to David, as Ewald acknowledges. To call it an ideal description of a Jewish king, dramatically

put into such a ruler's mouth, does not do justice to the ring of earnestness in it. No doubt, subjective impressions are unreliable guides, but it is difficult to resist the impression that a kingly voice is audible here, speaking no ideal description, but his own stern resolves. It is a royal "proclamation against vice and immorality," appropriate to the beginning of a reign. If we accept the superscription, and interpret the abrupt question in ver. 2 "When wilt Thou come to me?" as the utterance of David's longing to see the Ark set in Jerusalem, we get a most fitting period for the psalm. He had but recently ascended the throne. The abuses and confusions of Saul's last troubled years had to be reformed. The new king felt that he was God's viceroy, and here declares what he will strive to make his monarchy—a copy of God's. He gives evil-doers fair warning, and bids all true men be sure of his favour. But he will take heed to himself, before he seeks to purge his court. So the psalm, though it has no strophical arrangement, falls into two main parts, in the first of which the king lays down the rule of his own conduct, and, in the second, declares war against the vermin that infest especially an Eastern court—slanderers, arrogant upstarts, traffickers in lies. His ambition is to have Jehovah's city worthy of its true King, when He shall deign to come and dwell in it. Therefore his face will be gracious to all good men, and his hand heavy on all evil-doers. The psalm is "A Mirror for Magistrates," to quote the title of an old English book.

The first words of the psalm seem at first sight incongruous with its contents, which are singularly devoid of praise. But they are not meant to refer to the psalm, but declare the singer's purpose for his

whole life. If the speaker is a real character, he is a poet-king. Of whom is that singular combination of royalty and minstrelsy so true as of David? If the speaker is an ideal, is it not peculiar that the first qualification of the ideal king should be that he is a poet? The suggestion that "loving-kindness and judgment" are here the monarch's virtues, not Divine attributes, is negatived by usage and by the following clause, "To Thee, *Jehovah*, will I sing." But it is as a king that the psalmist vows to praise these twin characteristics of the Divine rule; and his song is to be accompanied by melodious deeds, which shape themselves after that pattern for rulers and all men. Earthly power is then strongest when, like God's, it is informed by loving-kindness and based on righteousness. In this connection, it is significant that this psalm, describing what a king should be, has been placed immediately after the series which tells who the true King of Israel and the world is, in whom these same attributes are ever linked together.

Vv. 2–4 outline the king's resolves for himself. With noble self-control, this ruler of men sets before himself the narrow, thorny way of perfectness, not the broad, flowery road of indulgence. He owns a law above himself and a far-off goal of moral completeness, which, he humbly feels, is yet unattained, but which he vows will never be hidden from his undazzled eyes, by the glitter of lower earthly good, or the rank mists of sensual pleasures. He had abundant facilities for reaching lower aims, but he turns from these to "give heed" to the way of perfectness. That resolve must be clearly and strongly made by every man, prince or peasant, who would attain to the dominion over self and externals, which is man's true royalty.

The suddenly interjected question of longing, "When wilt Thou come to me?" is best explained by connecting it with David's desire that the Ark should be permanently domiciled in Jerusalem—a desire which was checked by his reflections on his own unworthiness (2 Sam. vi. 9). Now he feels that, on the one hand, his whole-hearted desire after righteousness makes him capable of receiving such a guest; and that, on the other, his firmest resolves will be evanescent, without God's presence to confirm his wavering and to help him to make his resolves into acts. He longed for that "coming" of the symbol of God's dwelling with men, not with heathenish desire to have it as a magic-working charm against outward foes, but as helping his faith to grasp the fact that God was with him, as his ally in the nobler fight against his own baseness and his position's temptations. We dare not ask God to come to us, unless we are conscious of desire to be pure; we cannot hope to realise that desire, unless He is with us. So, the natural sequel of determination to give heed to the way of perfectness is petition to Him, to come very near and take up His abode with us.

After this most significant interruption, the stream of resolutions runs on again. In the comparative privacy of his house, he will "walk with a perfect heart," ever seeking to translate his convictions of right into practice, and regulating his activities by conscience. The recesses of an Eastern palace were often foul with lust, and hid extravagances of caprice and self-indulgence; but this ruler will behave there as one who has Jehovah for a guest. The language of ver. 3 is very energetic. "Any villainous thing" is literally "a thing of Belial"; "the doing of transgressions" is literally "doing deeds that turn aside,

i.e. from the course prescribed. He will not take the former as models for imitation or objects of desire. The latter kindle wholesome hatred; and if ever he is tempted to dally with sin, he will shake it off, as a venomous reptile that has fastened on him. "A perfect heart" will expel "a perverse heart," but neither will the one be gained nor the other banished without vehement and persistent effort. This man does not trust the improvement of his character to chance or expect it to come of itself. He means to bend his strength to effect it. He cannot but "know evil," in the sense of being aware of it and conscious of its seductions; but he will *not* "know" it, in the sense of letting it into his inner nature, or with the knowledge which is experience and love.

From ver. 5 onwards, the king lays down the principles of his public action, and that mainly in reference to bad men. One verse suffices to tell of his fostering care of good men. The rest describes how he means to be a terror to evil-doers. The vices against which he will implacably war are not gross crimes such as ordinarily bring down the sword of public justice. This monarch has regard to more subtle evils—slander, superciliousness, inflated vanity ("proud-hearted" in ver. 5 is literally wide in heart, *i.e.* dilated with self-sufficiency or ambition). His eyes are quick to mark "the faithful in the land." He looks for those whose faithfulness to God guarantees their fidelity to men and general reliableness. His servants shall be like himself, followers of "the way of perfectness." In that court, dignity and office will go, not to talent, or to crafty arts of servility, or to birth, but to moral and religious qualities.

In the last two verses, the psalm returns to evil-

doers. The actors and speakers of lies shall be cleared out of the palace. Such base creatures crawl and sting about the purlieus of courts, but this prince will have his immediate *entourage* free from them. He longs to get rid of the stifling atmosphere of deceit, and to have honest men round him, as many a ruler before and since has longed. But not only palace, but city, has to be swept clean, and one cleansing at the beginning of a reign will not be enough. So "every morning" the work has to be done again. "Ill weeds grow apace," and the mower must not get weary of his scythe. God's city must be pure. "Without are . . . whatsoever worketh and maketh a lie."

The psalm is a God-given vision of what a king and a kingdom might and should be. If David wrote it, his early resolves were sadly falsified. "I will set no villainous things before my eyes"—yet from his "house," where he vowed to "walk with a perfect heart," he looked on Bathsheba. "He that speaks lies shall not be established in my sight"—yet Absalom, Ahithophel, and the sons of Zeruiah stood round his throne. The shortcomings of the earthly shadows of God's rule force us to turn away to the only perfect King and Kingdom, Jesus Christ and His realm, and to the city "into which shall in nowise enter anything that defileth."

PSALM CII.

1 Jehovah, hear my prayer,
And let my cry come to Thee.
2 Hide not Thy face from me in the day of my trouble,
Bend to me Thine ear,
In the day that I call answer me speedily.

3 For my days are consumed in smoke,
And my bones are burned like a brand.
4 Smitten like herbage and dried up is my heart,
For I have forgotten to eat my bread.
5 Because of the noise of my groaning,
My bones stick to my flesh.
6 I am like a pelican of the desert,
I am become like an owl of the ruins.
7 I am sleepless,
And am become like a sparrow lonely on the roof.
8 All day long my enemies reproach me,
They that are mad at me curse by me.
9 For ashes like bread have I eaten,
And my drink with tears have I mingled.
10 Because of Thy indignation and Thy wrath,
For Thou hast caught me up and flung me away
11 My days are like a long-drawn-out shadow,
And I like herbage am dried up.

12 But Thou, Jehovah, sittest enthroned for ever,
And Thy memorial is to generation after generation.
13 Thou, Thou shalt arise, shalt pity Zion,
For it is time to show her favour,
For the appointed time is come.
14 For Thy servants delight in her stones,
And [to] her dust they show favour.
15 And the nations shall fear the name of Jehovah,
And all the kings of the earth His glory,

16 Because Jehovah has built up Zion,
He has been seen in His glory,
17 He has turned to the prayer of the destitute,
And has not despised their prayer.
18 This shall be written for the generation after,
And a people [yet] to be created shall praise Jah.
19 Because He has looked down from His holy height,
Jehovah has gazed from heaven upon the earth,
20 To hear the sighing of the captive,
To free the children of death,
21 That they may tell in Zion the name of Jehovah,
And His praise in Jerusalem,
22 When the peoples are assembled together,
And the kingdoms to serve Jehovah.

23 He has brought down my strength in the way,
He has cut short my days.
24 I said, "My God, take me not away at the half of my days,"
[Since] Thy years endure through all generations.
25 Of old Thou didst found the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Thy hands.
26 They, they shall perish, but Thou, Thou shalt continue,
And all of them like a garment shall wear out,
Like a robe shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed.
27 But Thou art He,
And Thy years shall never end.
28 The sons of Thy servants shall dwell,
And their seed shall be established before Thee.

VERSES 13, 14, show that the psalm was written when Zion was in ruins and the time of her restoration at hand. Sadness shot with hope, as a cloud with sunlight, is the singer's mood. The pressure of present sorrows points to the time of the Exile; the lightening of these, by the expectation that the hour for their cessation has all but struck, points to the close of that period. There is a general consensus of opinion on this, though Baethgen is hesitatingly inclined to adopt the Maccabean date, and Cheyne prefers the time of Nehemiah, mainly because the

references to the "stones" and "dust" recall to him "Nehemiah's lonely ride round the burned walls," and "Sanballat's mocking at the Jews for attempting to revive the stones out of heaps of rubbish" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 70). These references would equally suit any period of desolation; but the point of time indicated by ver. 13 is more probably the eve of restoration than the completion of the begun and interrupted re-establishment of Israel in its land. Like many of the later psalms, this is largely coloured by earlier ones, as well as by Deuteronomy, Job, and the second half of Isaiah, while it has also reminiscences of Jeremiah. Some commentators have, indeed, supposed it to be his work.

The turns of thought are simple. While there is no clear strophical arrangement, there are four broadly distinguished parts: a prelude, invoking God to hearken (vv. 1, 2); a plaintive bemoaning of the psalmist's condition (vv. 3–11); a triumphant rising above his sorrows, and rejoicing in the fair vision of a restored Jerusalem, whose Temple-courts the nations tread (vv. 12–22); and a momentary glance at his sorrows and brief life, which but spurs him to lay hold the more joyously on God's eternity, wherein he finds the pledge of the fulfilment of his hopes and of God's promises (vv. 23–28).

The opening invocations in vv. 1, 2, are mostly found in other psalms. "Let my cry come unto Thee" recalls Psalm xviii. 6. "Hide not Thy face" is like Psalm xxvii. 9. "In the day of my straits" recurs in Psalm lix. 16. "Bend to me Thy ear" is in Psalm xxxi. 2. "In the day when I call" is as in Psalm lvi. 9. "Answer me speedily" is found in Psalm lxix. 17. But the psalmist is not a cold-blooded compiler, weaving a web from old threads, but a suffering man,

fain to give his desires voice, in words which sufferers before him had hallowed, and securing a certain solace by reiterating familiar petitions. They are none the less his own, because they have been the cry of others. Some aroma of the answers that they drew down in the past clings to them still, and makes them fragrant to him.

Sorrow and pain are sometimes dumb, but, in Eastern natures, more often eloquent; finding ease in recounting their pangs. The psalmist's first words of self-lamentation echo familiar strains, as he bases his cry for speedy answer on the swiftness with which his days are being whirled away, and melting like smoke as it escapes from a chimney. The image suggests another. The fire that makes the smoke is that in which his very bones are smouldering like a brand. The word for *bones* is in the singular, the bony framework being thought of as articulated into a whole. "Brand" is a doubtful rendering of a word which the Authorised Version, following some ancient Jewish authorities, renders *hearth*, as do Delitzsch and Cheyne. It is used in Isa. xxxiii. 14 as = "burning," but "brand" is required to make out the metaphor. The same theme of physical decay is continued in ver. 4, with a new image struck out by the ingenuity of pain. His heart is "smitten" as by sunstroke (compare Psalm cxxi. 6, Isa. xlix. 10, and for still closer parallels Hosea ix. 16, Jonah iv. 7, in both of which the same effect of fierce sunshine is described as the sufferer here bewails). His heart withers like Jonah's gourd. The "For" in ver. 4 *b* can scarcely be taken as giving the reason for this withering. It must rather be taken as giving the proof that it was so withered, as might be concluded by beholders from the fact that he refused

his food (Baethgen). The psalmist apparently intends in ver. 5 to describe himself as worn to a skeleton by long-continued and passionate lamentations. But his phrase is singular. One can understand that emaciation should be described by saying that the bones adhered to the skin, the flesh having wasted away, but that they stick to the flesh can only describe it, by giving a wide meaning to "flesh," as including the whole outward part of the frame in contrast with the internal framework. Lam. iv. 8 gives the more natural expression. The psalmist has groaned himself into emaciation. Sadness and solitude go well together. We plunge into lonely places when we would give voice to our grief. The poet's imagination sees his own likeness in solitude-loving creatures. The pelican is never now seen in Palestine but on Lake Huleh. Thomson ("Land and Book," p. 260: London, 1861) speaks of having found it there only, and describes it as "the most sombre, austere bird I ever saw." "The owl of the ruins" is identified by Tristram ("Land of Israel," p. 67) with the small owl *Athene meridionalis*, the emblem of Minerva, which "is very characteristic of all the hilly and rocky portions of Syria." The *sparrow* may be here a generic term for any small song-bird, but there is no need for departing from the narrower meaning. Thomson (p. 43) says: "When one of them has lost his mate—an every-day occurrence—he will sit on the housetop alone and lament by the hour."

The division of ver. 7 is singular, as the main pause in it falls on "am become," to the disruption of the logical continuity. The difficulty is removed by Wickes ("Accentuation of the Poetical Books," p. 29), who gives several instances which seem to establish the law that, in the musical accentuation, there is "an apparent

reluctance to place the main dividing accent after the first, or before the last, word of the verse." The division is not logical, and we may venture to neglect it, and arrange as above, restoring the dividing accent to its place after the first word. Others turn the flank of the difficulty by altering the text to read, "I am sleepless and must moan aloud" (so Cheyne, following Olshausen).

Yet another drop of bitterness in the psalmist's cup is the frantic hatred which pours itself out in voluble mockery all day long, making a running accompaniment to his wail. Solitary as he is, he cannot get beyond hearing of shrill insults. So miserable does he seem, that enemies take him and his distresses for a formula of imprecation, and can find no blacker curse to launch at other foes than to wish that they may be like him. So ashes, the token of mourning, are his food, instead of the bread which he had forgotten to eat, and there are more tears than wine in the cup he drinks.

But all this only tells how sad he is. A deeper depth opens when he remembers why he is sad. The bitterest thought to a sufferer is that his sufferings indicate God's displeasure; but it may be wholesome bitterness, which, leading to the recognition of the sin which evokes the wrath, may change into a solemn thankfulness for sorrows which are discerned to be chastisements, inflicted by that Love of which indignation is one form. The psalmist confesses sin in the act of bewailing sorrow, and sees behind all his pains the working of that hand whose interposition for him he ventures to implore. The tremendous metaphor of ver. 10 *b* pictures it as thrust forth from heaven to grasp the feeble sufferer, as an eagle stoops to plunge its talons into a lamb. It lifts him high, only to give

more destructive impetus to the force with which it flings him down, to the place where he lies, a huddled heap of broken bones and wounds. His plaint returns to its beginning, lamenting the brief life which is being wasted away by sore distress. Lengthening shadows tell of approaching night. His day is nearing sunset. It will be dark soon, and, as he has said (ver. 4), his very self is withering and becoming like dried-up herbage.

One can scarcely miss the tone of individual sorrow in the preceding verses; but national restoration, not personal deliverance, is the theme of the triumphant central part of the psalm. That is no reason for flattening the previous verses into the voice of the personified Israel, but rather for hearing in them the sighing of one exile, on whom the general burden weighed sorely. He lifts his tear-laden eyes to heaven, and catches a vision there which changes, as by magic, the key of his song—Jehovah sitting in royal state (compare Psalms ix. 7, xxix. 10) for ever. That silences complaints, breathes courage into the feeble and hope into the despairing. In another mood the thought of the eternal rule of God might make man's mortality more bitter, but Faith grasps it, as enfolding assurances which turn groaning into ringing praise. For the vision is not only of an everlasting Some One who works a sovereign will, but of the age-long dominion of Him whose name is Jehovah; and since that name is the revelation of His nature, it, too, endures for ever. It is the name of Israel's covenant-making and keeping God. Therefore, ancient promises have not gone to water, though Israel is an exile, and all the old comfort and confidence are still welling up from the Name. Zion cannot die while Zion's God lives. Lam. v. 19 is probably the original

of this verse, but the psalmist has changed "throne" into "memorial," *i.e. name*, and thereby deepened the thought. The assurance that God will restore Zion rests not only on His faithfulness, but on signs which show that the sky is reddening towards the day of redemption. The singer sees the indication that the hour fixed in God's eternal counsels is at hand, because he sees how God's servants, who have a claim on Him and are in sympathy with His purposes, yearn lovingly after the sad ruins and dust of the forlorn city. Some new access of such feelings must have been stirring among the devouter part of the exiles. Many large truths are wrapped in the psalmist's words. The desolations of Zion knit true hearts to her more closely. The more the Church or any good cause is depressed, the more need for its friends to cling to it. God's servants should see that their sympathies go toward the same objects as God's do. They are proved to be His servants, because they favour what He favours. Their regards, turned to existing evils, are the precursors of Divine intervention for the remedy of these. When good men begin to lay the Church's or the world's miseries to heart, it is a sign that God is beginning to heal them. The cry of God's servants can "hasten the day of the Lord," and preludes His appearance like the keen morning air stirring the sleeping flowers before sunrise.

The psalmist anticipates that a rebuilt Zion will ensure a worshipping world. He expresses that confidence, which he shares with Isa. xl.–lxvi., in vv. 15–18. The name and glory of Jehovah will become objects of reverence to all the earth, because of the manifestation of them by the rebuilding of Zion, which is a witness to all men of His power and tender regard to His

people's cry. The past tenses of vv. 16, 17, do not indicate that the psalm is later than the Restoration. It is contemplated as already accomplished, because it is the occasion of the "fear" prophesied in ver. 15, and consequently prior in time to it. "Destitute," in ver. 17, is literally *naked* or *stript*. It is used in Jer. xvii. 6 as the name of a desert plant, probably a dwarf juniper, stunted and dry, but seems to be employed here as simply designating utter destitution. Israel had been stripped of every beauty and made naked before her enemies. Despised, she had cried to God, and now is clothed again with the garments of salvation, "as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

A wondering world will adore her delivering God. The glowing hopes of psalmist and prophet seem to be dreams, since the restored Israel attracted no such observance and wrought no such convictions. But the singer was not wrong in believing that the coming of Jehovah in His glory for the rebuilding of Zion would sway the world to homage. His facts were right, but he did not know their perspective, nor could he understand how many weary years lay, like a deep gorge hidden from the eye of one who looks over a wide prospect, between the rebuilding of which he was thinking, and that truer establishment of the city of God, which is again parted from the period of universal recognition of Jehovah's glory by so many sad and stormy generations. But the vision is true. The coming of Jehovah in His glory will be followed by a world's recognition of its light.

That praise accruing to Jehovah shall be not only universal, but shall go on sounding, with increasing volume in its tone, through coming generations. This expectation is set forth in vv. 18–22, which substan-

tially reiterate the thought of the preceding, with the addition that there is to be a new Israel, a people yet to be created (Psalm xxii. 31). The psalmist did not know "the deep things he spoke." He did know that Israel was immortal, and that the seed of life was in the tree that had cast its leaves and stood bare and apparently dead. But he did not know the process by which that new Israel was to be created, nor the new elements of which it was to consist. His confidence teaches us never to despair of the future of God's Church, however low its present state, but to look down the ages, in calm certainty that, however externals may change, the succession of God's children will never fail, nor the voice of their praise ever fall silent.

The course of God's intervention for Israel is described in vv. 19, 20. His looking down from heaven is equivalent to His observance, as the all-seeing Witness and Judge (compare Psalms xiv. 2, xxxiii. 13, 14, etc.), and is preparatory to His hearing the sighing of the captive Israel, doomed to death. The language of ver. 20 is apparently drawn from Psalm lxxix. 11. The thought corresponds to that of ver. 17. The purpose of His intervention is set forth in vv. 21, 22, as being the declaration of Jehovah's name and praise in Jerusalem before a gathered world. The aim of Jehovah's dealings is that all men, through all generations, may know and praise Him. That is but another way of saying that He infinitely desires, and perpetually works for, men's highest good. For our sakes, He desires so much that we should know Him, since the knowledge is life eternal. He is not greedy of adulation nor dependent on recognition, but He loves men too well not to rejoice in being understood and loved by them, since Love ever hungers for return. The psalmist

saw what shall one day be, when, far down the ages, he beheld the world gathered in the temple-courts, and heard the shout of their praise borne to him up the stream of time. He penetrated to the inmost meaning of the Divine acts, when he proclaimed that they were all done for the manifestation of the Name, which cannot but be praised when it is known.

If the poet was one of the exiles, on whom the burden of the general calamity weighed as a personal sorrow, it is very natural that his glowing anticipations of national restoration should be, as in this psalm, enclosed in a setting of more individual complaint and petition. The transition from these to the purely impersonal centre of the psalm, and the recurrence to them in vv. 23–28, are inexplicable, if the "I" of the first and last parts is Israel, but perfectly intelligible if it is one Israelite. For a moment the tone of sadness is heard in ver. 23; but the thought of his own afflicted and brief life is but a stimulus to the psalmist to lay hold of God's immutability and to find rest there. The Hebrew text reads "*His* strength," and is followed by the LXX., Vulgate, Hengstenberg, and Kay ("He afflicted on the way with His power"); but the reading of the Hebrew margin, adopted above and by most commentators, is preferable, as supplying an object for the verb, which is lacking in the former reading, and as corresponding to "*my* days" in *b*.

The psalmist has felt the exhaustion of long sorrow and the shortness of his term. Will God do all these glorious things of which he has been singing, and he, the singer, not be there to see? That would mingle bitterness in his triumphant anticipations; for it would be little to him, lying in his grave, that Zion should be built again. The hopes with which some would

console us for the loss of the Christian assurance of immortality, that the race shall march on to new power and nobleness, are poor substitutes for continuance of our own lives and for our own participation in the glories of the future. The psalmist's prayer, which takes God's eternity as its reason for deprecating his own premature death, echoes the inextinguishable confidence of the devout heart, that somehow even its fleeting being has a claim to be assimilated in duration to its Eternal Object of trust and aspiration. The contrast between God's years and man's days may be brooded on in bitterness or in hope. They who are driven by thinking of their own mortality to clutch, with prayerful faith, God's eternity, use the one aright, and will not be deprived of the other.

The solemn grandeur of vv. 25, 26, needs little commentary, but it may be noted that a reminiscence of Isaiah II. runs through them, both in the description of the act of creation of heaven and earth (Isa. xlviii. 13, xliv. 24), and in that of their decaying like a garment (Isa. li. 6, liv. 10). That which has been created can be removed. The creatural is necessarily the transient. Possibly, too, the remarkable expression "changed," as applied to the visible creation, may imply the thought which had already been expressed in Isaiah, and was destined to receive such deepening by the Christian truth of the new heavens and new earth—a truth the contents of which are dim to us until it is fulfilled. But whatever may be the fate of creatures, He who receives no accession to His stable being by originating suffers no diminution by extinguishing them. Man's days, the earth's ages, and the æons of the heavens pass, and still "Thou art He," the same Unchanging Author of change. Measures of time fail

when applied to His being, whose years have not that which all divisions of time have—an end. An unending year is a paradox, which, in relation to God, is a truth.

It is remarkable that the psalmist does not draw the conclusion that he himself shall receive an answer to his prayer, but that "the children of Thy servants shall dwell," *i.e.* in the land, and that there will always be an Israel "established before Thee." He contemplates successive generations as in turn dwelling in the promised land (and perhaps in the ancient "dwelling-place to all generations," even in God); but of his own continuance he is silent. Was he not assured of that? or was he so certain of the answer to his prayer that he had forgotten himself in the vision of the eternal God and the abiding Israel? Having regard to the late date of the psalm, it is hard to believe that silence meant ignorance, while it may well be that it means a less vivid and assured hope of immortality, and a smaller space occupied by that hope than with us. But the other explanation is not to be left out of view, and the psalmist's oblivion of self in rapt gazing on God's eternal being—the pledge of His servants' perpetuity—may teach us that we reach the summit of Faith when we lose ourselves in God.

The Epistle to the Hebrews quotes vv. 25–27 as spoken of "the Son." Such an application of the words rests on the fact that the psalm speaks of the coming of Jehovah for redemption, who is none other than Jehovah manifested fully in the Messiah. But Jehovah whose coming brings redemption and His recognition by the world is also Creator. Since, then, the Incarnation is, in truth, the coming of Jehovah, which the psalmist, like all the prophets, looked for

as the consummation, He in whom the redeeming Jehovah was manifested is He in whom Jehovah the Creator "made the worlds." The writer of the Epistle is not asserting that the psalmist consciously spoke of the Messiah, but he is declaring that his words, read in the light of history, point to Jesus as the crowning manifestation of the redeeming, and therefore necessarily of the creating, God.

PSALM CIII.

1 Bless Jehovah, my soul,
And all within me [bless] His holy name!
2 Bless Jehovah, my soul!
And forget not all His benefits,
3 Who forgives all thy inquity,
Who heals all thy diseases,
4 Who redeems thy life from the pit,
Who crowns thee [with] loving-kindness and compassions,
5 Who satisfies thy mouth (?) with good,
[So that] thy youth is renewed like the eagle.

6 Jehovah executes righteousness
And judgments for all the oppressed.
7 He made known His ways to Moses,
To the children of Israel His great deeds.
8 Full of compassion and gracious is Jehovah,
Slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness.
9 He will not continually contend,
And will not keep His anger for ever.
10 Not according to our sins has He dealt with us,
And not according to our iniquities has He recompensed us.
11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
[So] great is His loving-kindness to them that fear Him.
12 As far as sunrise is from sunset,
[So] far has He put our transgressions from us.
13 As a father has compassion on his children,
Jehovah has compassion on them that fear Him.
14 For He—He knows our frame,
Being mindful that we are dust.
15 Frail man—like grass are his days,
Like a flower of the field, so he flowers.
16 For a wind passes over him and he is not,
And his place knows him no more.

17 But the loving-kindness of Jehovah is from everlasting
even to everlasting upon them that fear Him,
And His righteousness is to children's children;
18 To those who keep His covenant,
And to those who remember His statutes to do them

19 Jehovah has established His throne in the heavens,
And His kingdom rules over all.
20 Bless Jehovah, ye His angels,
Ye mighty in strength, who perform His word,
Hearkening to the voice of His word!
21 Bless Jehovah, all His hosts,
Ye His ministers, who perform His will!
22 Bless Jehovah, all His works,
In all places of His dominion!
Bless Jehovah, my soul!

THERE are no clouds in the horizon, nor notes of sadness in the music, of this psalm. No purer outburst of thankfulness enriches the Church. It is well that, amid the many psalms which give voice to mingled pain and trust, there should be one of unalloyed gladness, as untouched by sorrow as if sung by spirits in heaven. Because it is thus purely an outburst of thankful joy, it is the more fit to be pondered in times of sorrow.

The psalmist's praise flows in one unbroken stream. There are no clear marks of division, but the river broadens as it runs, and personal benefits and individual praise open out into gifts which are seen to fill the universe, and thanksgiving which is heard from every extremity of His wide dominion of loving-kindness.

In ver. 1–5 the psalmist sings of his own experience. His *spirit*, or *ruling self*, calls on his "soul," the weaker and more feminine part, which may be cast down (Psalms xlii., xliii.) by sorrow, and needs stimulus and control, to contemplate God's gifts and to praise Him. A good man will rouse himself to such exercise,

and coerce his more sensuous and sluggish faculties to their noblest use. Especially must memory be directed, for it keeps woefully short-lived records of mercies, especially of continuous ones. God's gifts are all "benefits," whether they are bright or dark. The catalogue of blessings lavished on the singer's soul begins with forgiveness and ends with immortal youth. The profound consciousness of sin, which it was one aim of the Law to evoke, underlies the psalmist's praise; and he who does not feel that no blessings could come from heaven, unless forgiveness cleared the way for them, has yet to learn the deepest music of thankfulness. It is followed by "healing" of "all thy diseases," which is no cure of merely bodily ailments, any more than redeeming of life "from the pit" is simply preservation of physical existence. In both there is at least included, even if we do not say that it only is in view, the operation of the pardoning God in delivering from the sicknesses and death of the spirit.

The soul thus forgiven and healed is crowned with "loving-kindness and compassions," wreathed into a garland for a festive brow, and its adornment is not only a result of these Divine attributes, but the very things themselves, so that an effluence from God beautifies the soul. Nor is even this all, for the same gifts which are beauty are also sustenance, and God satisfies the soul with good, especially with the only real good, Himself. The word rendered above "mouth" is extremely difficult. It is found in Psalm xxxii. 9, where it seems best taken in the meaning of *trappings* or *harness*. That meaning is inappropriate here, though Hupfeld tries to retain it. The LXX. renders "desire," which fits well, but can scarcely be established. Other renderings, such as "age" or

"duration"—*i.e.*, the whole extent of life—have been suggested. Hengstenberg and others regard the word as a designation of the soul, somewhat resembling the other term applied to it, "glory"; but the fact that it is the soul which is addressed negatives that explanation. Graetz and others resort to a slight textual alteration, resulting in the reading "thy misery." Delitzsch, in his latest editions, adopts this emendation doubtingly, and supposes that with the word *misery* or *affliction* there is associated the idea "of beseeching and therefore of longing," whence the LXX. rendering would originate. "Mouth" is the most natural word in such a connection, and its retention here is sanctioned by "the interpretation of the older versions in Psalm xxxii. 9 and the Arabic cognate" (Perowne). It is therefore retained above, though with some reluctance.

How should a man thus dealt with grow old? The body may, but not the soul. Rather it will drop powers that can decay, and for each thus lost will gain a stronger—moulting, and not being stripped of its wings, though it changes their feathers. There is no need to make the psalmist responsible for the fables of the eagle's renewal of its youth. The comparison with the monarch of the air does not refer to the process by which the soul's wings are made strong, but to the result in wings that never tire, but bear their possessor far up in the blue and towards the throne.

In vv. 6–18 the psalmist sweeps a greater circle, and deals with God's blessings to mankind. He has Israel specifically in view in the earlier verses, but passes beyond Israel to all "who fear Him." It is very instructive that he begins with the definite fact of God's revelation through Moses. He is not spinning a filmy idea of a God out of his own consciousness,

but he has learned all that he knows of Him from His historical self-revelation. A hymn of praise which has not revelation for its basis will have many a quaver of doubt. The God of men's imaginations, consciences, or yearnings is a dim shadow. The God to whom love turns undoubting and praise rises without one note of discord is the God who has spoken His own name by deeds which have entered into the history of the world. And what has He revealed Himself to be? The psalmist answers almost in the words of the proclamation made to Moses (vv. 8, 9). The lawgiver had prayed, "I beseech Thee . . . show me now Thy ways, that I may know Thee"; and the prayer had been granted, when "the Lord passed by before him," and proclaimed His name as "full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth." That proclamation fills the singer's heart, and his whole soul leaps up in him, as he meditates on its depth and sweetness. Now, after so many centuries of experience, Israel can repeat with full assurance the ancient self-revelation, which has been proved true by many "mighty deeds."

The psalmist's thoughts are still circling round the idea of forgiveness, with which he began his contemplations. He and his people equally need it; and all that revelation of God's character bears directly on His relation to sin. Jehovah is "long of anger"—*i.e.*, slow to allow it to flash out in punishment—and as lavish of loving-kindness as sparing of wrath. That character is disclosed by deeds. Jehovah's graciousness forces Him to "contend" against a man's sins for the man's sake. But it forbids Him to be perpetually chastising and condemning, like a harsh taskmaster. Nor does He keep His anger ever burning, though He

does keep His loving-kindness aflame for a thousand generations. Lightning is transitory; sunshine, constant. Whatever His chastisements, they have been less than our sins. The heaviest is "light," and "for a moment," when compared with the "exceeding weight of" our guilt.

The glorious metaphors in vv. 11, 12, traverse heaven to the zenith, and from sunrise to sunset, to find distances distant enough to express the towering height of God's mercy and the completeness of His removal from us of our sins. That pure arch, the top-stone of which nor wings nor thoughts can reach, sheds down all light and heat which make growth and cherish life. It is high above us, but it pours blessings on us, and it bends down all round the horizon to kiss the low, dark earth. The loving-kindness of Jehovah is similarly lofty, boundless, all-fructifying. In ver. 11 *b* the parallelism would be more complete if a small textual alteration were adopted, which would give "high" instead of "great"; but the slight departure which the existing text makes from precise correspondence with *a* is of little moment, and the thought is sufficiently intelligible as the words stand. Between East and West all distances lie. To the eye they bound the world. So far does God's mercy bear away our sins. Forgiveness and cleansing are inseparably united.

But the song drops—or shall we say rises?—from these magnificent measures of the immeasurable to the homely image of a father's pity. We may lose ourselves amid the amplitudes of the lofty, wide-stretching sky, but this emblem of paternal love goes straight to our hearts. A pitying God! What can be added to that? But that fatherly pity is decisively limited to "them that fear Him." It is possible, then, to put

oneself outside the range of that abundant dew, and the universality of God's blessings does not hinder self-exclusion from them.

In vv. 14–16 man's brief life is brought in, not as a sorrow or as a cloud darkening the sunny joy of the song, but as one reason for the Divine compassion. "He, He knows our frame." The word rendered "frame" is literally "formation" or "fashioning," and comes from the same root as the verb employed in Gen. ii. 7 to describe man's creation, "The Lord God *formed* man of the dust of the ground." It is also used for the potter's action in moulding earthen vessels (Isa. xxix. 16, etc.). So, in the next clause, "dust" carries on the allusion to Genesis, and the general idea conveyed is that of frailty. Made from dust and fragile as an earthen vessel, man by his weakness appeals to Jehovah's compassion. A blow, delivered with the full force of that almighty hand, would "break him as a potter's vessel is broken." Therefore God handles us tenderly, as mindful of the brittle material with which He has to deal. The familiar figure of fading vegetation, so dear to the psalmists, recurs here; but it is touched with peculiar delicacy, and there is something very sweet and uncomplaining in the singer's tone. The image of the fading flower, burned up by the simoom, and leaving one little spot in the desert robbed of its beauty, veils much of the terror of death, and expresses no shrinking, though great pathos. Ver. 16 may either describe the withering of the flower, or the passing away of frail man. In the former case, the pronouns would be rendered by "it" and "its"; in the latter, by "he," "him," and "his." The latter seems the preferable explanation. Ver. 16*b* is verbally the same as Job vii. 10. The contemplation of mortality tinges the

song with a momentary sadness, which melts into the pensive, yet cheerful, assurance that mortality has an accompanying blessing, in that it makes a plea for pity from a Father's heart.

But another, more triumphant thought springs up. A devout soul, full-charged with thankfulness based on faith in God's name and ways, cannot but be led by remembering man's brief life to think of God's eternal years. So, the key changes at ver. 17 from plaintive minors to jubilant notes. The psalmist pulls out all the stops of his organ, and rolls along his music in a great *crescendo* to the close. The contrast of God's eternity with man's transitoriness is like the similar trend of thought in Psalms xc., cii. The extension of His loving-kindness to children's children, and its limitation to those who fear Him and keep His covenant in obedience, rest upon Exod. xx. 6, xxxiv. 7; Deut. vii. 9. That limitation has been laid down twice already (vv. 11–13). All men share in that loving-kindness, and receive the best gifts from it of which they are capable; but those who cling to God in loving reverence, and who are moved by that blissful "fear" which has no torment, to yield their wills to Him in inward submission and outward obedience, do enter into the inner recesses of that loving-kindness, and are replenished with good, of which others are incapable.

If God's loving-kindness is "from everlasting to everlasting," will not His children share in it for as long? The psalm has no articulate doctrine of a future life; but is there not in that thought of an eternal outgoing of God's heart to its objects some (perhaps half-conscious) implication that these will continue to exist? May not the psalmist have felt that,

though the flower of earthly life "passed in the passing of an hour," the root would be somehow transplanted to the higher "house of the Lord," and "flourish in the courts of our God," as long as His everlasting mercy poured its sunshine? We, at all events, know that His eternity is the pledge of ours. "Because I live, ye shall live also."

From ver. 19 to the end, the psalm takes a still wider sweep. It now embraces the universe. But it is noticeable that there is no more about "loving-kindness" in these verses. Man's sin and frailty make him a fit recipient of it, but we do not know that in all creation another being, capable of and needing it, is found. Amid starry distances, amid heights and depths, far beyond sunrise and sunset, God's all-including kingdom stretches and blesses all. Therefore, all creatures are called on to bless Him, since all are blessed by Him, each according to its nature and need. If they have consciousness, they owe Him praise. If they have not, they praise Him by being. The angels, "heroes of strength," as the words literally read, are "His," and they not only execute His behests, but stand attent before Him, listening to catch the first whispered indication of His will. "His hosts" are by some taken to mean the stars; but surely it is more congruous to suppose that beings who are His "ministers" and perform His "will" are intelligent beings. Their praise consists in hearkening to and doing His word. But obedience is not all their praise; for they, too, bring Him tribute of conscious adoration in more melodious music than ever sounded on earth. That "choir invisible" praises the King of heaven; but later revelation has taught us that men shall teach a new song to "principalities and powers in heavenly places," because

men only can praise Him whose loving-kindness to them, sinful and dying, redeemed them by His blood.

Therefore, it is no drop from these heavenly anthems, when the psalm circles round at last to its beginning, and the singer calls on his soul to add its "little human praise" to the thunderous chorus. The rest of the universe praises the mighty Ruler; he blesses the forgiving, pitying Jehovah. Nature and angels, stars and suns, seas and forests, magnify their Maker and Sustainer; we can bless the God who pardons iniquities and heals diseases which our fellow-choristers never knew.

PSALM CIV.

1 My soul, bless Jehovah,
Jehovah my God, Thou art exceeding great,
Thou hast clothed Thyself with honour and majesty;
2 Covering Thyself with light as with a garment,
Stretching out the heavens like a curtain.
3 Who lays the beams of His chambers in the waters,
Who makes clouds His chariot,
Who walks on the wings of the wind,
4 Making winds His messengers,
Flaming fire His servants.

5 He sets fast the earth upon its foundations,
[That] it should not be moved for ever and aye.
6 [With] the deep as [with] a garment Thou didst cover it
Above the mountains stood the waters.
7 At Thy rebuke they fled,
At the voice of Thy thunder they were scared away.
8 —Up rose the mountains, down sank the valleys—
To the place which Thou hadst founded for them.
9 A bound hast Thou set [that] they should not pass over,
Nor return to cover the earth.

10 He sends forth springs into the glens,
Between the hills they take their way.
11 They give drink to every beast of the field,
The wild asses slake their thirst.
12 Above them dwell the birds of heaven,
From between the branches do they give their note.
13 He waters the mountains from His chambers,
With the fruit of Thy works the earth is satisfied.
14 He makes grass to spring for the cattle,
And the green herb for the service of men,
To bring forth bread from the earth,
15 And that wine may gladden the heart of feeble man;

To cause his face to shine with oil,
And that bread may sustain the heart of feeble man
16 The trees of Jehovah are satisfied,
The cedars of Lebanon which He has planted,
17 Wherein the birds nest;
The stork—the cypresses are her house.
18 The high mountains are for the wild goats,
The rocks are a refuge for the conies.

19 He has made the moon for (*i.e.*, to measure) seasons,
The sun knows its going down.
20 Thou appointest darkness and it is night,
Wherein all the beasts of the forest creep forth.
21 The young lions roar for their prey,
And to seek from God their meat.
22 The sun rises—they steal away,
And lay them down in their dens.
23 Forth goes man to his work
And to his labour till evening.
24 How manifold are Thy works, Jehovah!
In wisdom hast Thou made them all,
The earth is full of Thy possessions.
25 Yonder [is] the sea, great and spread on either hand,
There are creeping things without number,
Living creatures small and great.
26 There the ships go on,
[There is] that Leviathan whom Thou hast formed to sport in it.
27 All these look to Thee,
To give their food in its season.
28 Thou givest to them—they gather;
Thou openest Thy hand—they are filled [with good.
29 Thou hidest Thy face—they are panic-struck;
Thou withdrawest their breath—they expire,
And return to their dust.
30 Thou sendest orth Thy breath—they are created,
And Thou renewest the face of the earth.

31 Let the glory of Jehovah endure for ever,
Let Jehovah rejoice in His works.
32 Who looks on the earth and it trembles,
He touches the mountains and they smoke.
33 Let me sing to Jehovah while I live,
Let me harp to my God while I have being.

34 Be my meditation sweet to Him!
I, I will rejoice in Jehovah.
35 Be sinners consumed from the earth,
And the wicked be no more!
Bless Jehovah, my soul!
Hallelujah!

LIKE the preceding psalm, this one begins and ends with the psalmist's call to his soul to bless Jehovah. The inference has been drawn that both psalms have the same author, but that is much too large a conclusion from such a fact. The true lesson from it is that Nature, when looked at by an eye that sees it to be full of God, yields material for devout gratitude no less than do His fatherly "mercies to them that fear Him." The key-note of the psalm is struck in ver. 24, which breaks into an exclamation concerning the manifoldness of God's works and the wisdom that has shaped them all. The psalm is a gallery of vivid Nature-pictures, touched with wonderful grace and sureness of hand. Clearness of vision and sympathy with every living thing make the swift outlines inimitably firm and lovely. The poet's mind is like a crystal mirror, in which the Cosmos is reflected. He is true to the uniform Old Testament point of view, and regards Nature neither from the scientific nor æsthetic standpoint. To him it is the garment of God, the apocalypse of a present Deity, whose sustaining energy is but the prolongation of His creative act. All creatures depend on Him; His continuous action is their life. He rejoices in His works. The Creation narrative in Genesis underlies the psalm, and is in the main followed, though not slavishly.

Ver. 1 would be normal in structure if the initial invocation were omitted, and as ver. 35 would also be complete without it, the suggestion that it is, in both verses, a liturgical addition is plausible. The

verse sums up the whole of the creative act in one grand thought. In that act the invisible God has arrayed Himself in splendour and glory, making visible these inherent attributes. That is the deepest meaning of Creation. The Universe is the garment of God.

This general idea lays the foundation for the following picture of the process of creation which is coloured by reminiscences of Genesis. Here, as there, Light is the first-born of Heaven; but the influence of the preceding thought shapes the language, and Light is regarded as God's vesture. The Uncreated Light, who is darkness to our eyes, arrays Himself in created light, which reveals while it veils Him. Everywhere diffused, all-penetrating, all-gladdening, it tells of the Presence in which all creatures live. This clause is the poetic rendering of the work of the first creative day. The next clause in like manner deals with that of the second. The mighty arch of heaven is lifted and expanded over earth, as easily as a man draws the cloth or skin sides and canopy of his circular tent over its framework. But our roof is His floor; and, according to Genesis, the firmament (lit. expanse) separates the waters above from those beneath. So the psalm pictures the Divine Architect as laying the beams of His *upper chambers* (for so the word means) in these waters, above the tent roof. The fluid is solid at His will, and the most mobile becomes fixed enough to be the foundation of His royal abode. The custom of having chambers on the roof, for privacy and freshness, suggests the image.

In these introductory verses the poet is dealing with the grander instances of creative power, especially as realised in the heavens. Not till ver. 5 does he drop to earth. His first theme is God's dominion over the

elemental forces, and so he goes on to represent the clouds as His chariot, the wind as bearing Him on its swift pinions, and, as the parallelism requires, the winds as His messengers, and devouring fire as His servants. The rendering of ver. 4 adopted in Hebrews from the LXX. is less relevant to the psalmist's purpose of gathering all the forces which sweep through the wide heavens into one company of obedient servants of God, than that adopted above, and now generally recognised. It is to be observed that the verbs in vv. 2–4 are participles, which express continuous action. These creative acts were not done once for all, but are going on still and always. Preservation is continued creation.

With ver. 6 we pass to the work of the third of the Genesis days, and the verb is in the form which describes a historical fact. The earth is conceived of as formed, and already moulded into mountains and valleys, but all covered with "the deep" like a vesture —a sadly different one from the robe of Light which He wears. That weltering deep is bidden back to its future appointed bounds; and the process is grandly described, as if the waters were sentient, and, panic-struck at God's voice, took to flight. Ver. 8 *a* throws in a vivid touch, to the disturbance of grammatical smoothness. The poet has the scene before his eye, and as the waters flee he sees the earth emerging, the mountains soaring, and the vales sinking, and he breaks his sentence, as if in wonder at the lovely apparition, but returns, in ver. 8 *b*, to tell whither the fugitive waters fled—namely, to the ocean-depths. There they are hemmed in by God's will, and, as was promised to Noah, shall not again run wasting over a drowned world.

The picture of the emerging earth, with its variations of valleys and mountains, remains before the psalmist's eye throughout vv. 10–18, which describe how it is clothed and peopled. These effects are due to the beneficent ministry of the same element, when guided and restrained by God, which swathed the world with desolation. Water runs through the vales, and rain falls on the mountains. Therefore the former bear herbs and corn, vines and olives, and the latter are clothed with trees not planted by human hand, the mighty cedars which spread their broad shelves of steadfast green high up among the clouds. "Everything lives whithersoever water cometh," as Easterns know. Therefore round the drinking-places in the vales thirsty creatures gather, birds flit and sing; up among the cedars are peaceful nests, and inaccessible cliffs have their sure-footed inhabitants. All depend on water, and water is God's gift. The psalmist's view of Nature is characteristic in the direct ascription of all its processes to God. He makes the springs flow, and sends rain on the peaks. Equally characteristic is the absence of any expression of a sense of beauty in the sparkling streams tinkling down the gloomy wadies, or in the rain-storms darkening the hills, or in the green mantle of earth, or in the bright creatures. The psalmist is thinking of use, not of beauty. And yet it is a poet's clear and kindly eye which looks upon all, and sees the central characteristic of each,—the eager drinking of the wild ass; the music of the birds blending with the brawling of the stream, and sweeter because the singers are hidden among the branches; the freshly watered earth, "satisfied" with "the fruit of Thy works" (*i.e.*, the rain which God has sent from His "upper chambers"), the manifold gifts which by His

wondrous alchemy are produced from the ground by help of one agency, water; the forest trees with their foliage glistening, as if glad for the rain; the stork on her nest; the goats on the mountains; the "conies" (for which we have no popular name) hurrying to their holes in the cliffs. Man appears as depending, like the lower creatures, on the fruit of the ground; but he has more varied supplies, bread and wine and oil, and these not only satisfy material wants, but "gladden" and "strengthen" the heart. According to some, the word rendered "service" in ver. 14 means "tillage," a meaning which is supported by ver. 23, where the same word is rendered "labour," and which fits in well with the next clause of ver. 14, "to bring forth bread from the earth," which would describe the purpose of the tillage. His prerogative of labour is man's special differentia in creation. It is a token of his superiority to the happy, careless creatures who toil not nor spin. Earth does not yield him its best products without his co-operation. There would thus be an allusion to him as the only worker in creation, similar to that in ver. 23, and to the reference to the "ships" in ver. 26. But probably the meaning of "service," which is suggested by the parallelism, and does not introduce the new thought of co-operation with Nature or God, is to be preferred. The construction is somewhat difficult, but the rendering of vv. 14, 15, given above seems best. The two clauses with infinitive verbs (*to bring forth* and *to cause to shine*) are each followed by a clause in which the construction is varied into that with a finite verb, the meaning remaining the same; and all four clauses express the Divine purpose in causing vegetation to spring. Then the psalmist looks up once more to the

hills. "The trees of Jehovah" are so called, not so much because they are great, as because, unlike vines and olives, they have not been planted or tended by man, nor belong to him. Far above the valleys, where men and the cattle dependent on him live on earth's cultivated bounties, the unowned woods stand and drink God's gift of rain, while wild creatures lead free lives amid mountains and rocks.

With ver. 19 the psalmist passes to the fourth day, but thinks of moon and sun only in relation to the alternation of day and night as affecting creatural life on earth. The moon is named first, because the Hebrew day began with the evening. It is the *measurer*, by whose phases seasons (or, according to some, *festivals*) are reckoned. The sun is a punctual servant, knowing the hour to set and duly keeping it. "Thou appointest darkness and it is night." God wills, and His will effects material changes. He says to His servant Night, "Come," and she "comes." The psalmist had peopled the vales and mountains of his picture. Everywhere he had seen life fitted to its environment; and night is populous too. He had outlined swift sketches of tame and wild creatures, and now he half shows us beasts of prey stealing through the gloom. He puts his finger on two characteristics—their stealthy motions, and their cries which made night hideous. Even their roar was a kind of prayer, though they knew it not; it was God from whom they sought their food. It would not have answered the purpose to have spoken of "all the loves, Now sleeping in those quiet groves." The poet desired to show how there were creatures that found possibilities of happy life in all the variety of conditions fashioned by the creative Hand, which was thus shown to be moved by Wisdom

and Love. The sunrise sends these nocturnal animals back to their dens, and the world is ready for man. "The sun looked over the mountain's rim," and the beasts of prey slunk to their lairs, and man's day of toil began—the mark of his pre-eminence, God's gift for his good, by which he uses creation for its highest end and fulfils God's purpose. Grateful is the evening rest when the day has been filled with strenuous toil.

The picture of earth and its inhabitants is now complete, and the dominant thought which it leaves on the psalmist's heart is cast into the exultant and wondering exclamation of ver. 24. The variety as well as multitude of the forms in which God's creative idea is embodied, the Wisdom which shapes all, His ownership of all, are the impressions made by the devout contemplation of Nature. The scientist and the artist are left free to pursue their respective lines of investigation and impression; but scientist and artist must rise to the psalmist's point of view, if they are to learn the deepest lesson from the ordered kingdoms of Nature and from the beauty which floods the world.

With the exclamation in ver. 24 the psalmist has finished his picture of the earth, which he had seen as if emerging from the abyss, and watched as it was gradually clothed with fertility and peopled with happy life. He turns, in vv. 25, 26, to the other half of his Vision of Creation, and portrays the gathered and curbed waters which he now calls the "sea." As always in Scripture, it is described as it looks to a landsman, gazing out on it from the safe shore. The characteristics specified betray unfamiliarity with maritime pursuits. The far-stretching roll of the waters away out to the horizon, the mystery veiling the strange lives swarming in its depths, the extreme contrasts in

the magnitude of its inhabitants, strike the poet. He sees "the stately ships go on." The introduction of these into the picture is unexpected. We should have looked for an instance of the "small" creatures, to pair off with the "great" one, Leviathan, in the next words. "A modern poet," says Cheyne, *in loc.*, "would have joined the mighty whale to the fairy nautilus." It has been suggested that "ship" here is a name for the nautilus, which is common in the Eastern Mediterranean. The suggestion is a tempting one, as fitting in more smoothly with the antithesis of *small* and *great* in the previous clause. But, in the absence of any proof that the word has any other meaning than "ship," the suggestion cannot be taken as more than a probable conjecture. The introduction of "ships" into the picture is quite in harmony with the allusions to man's works in the former parts of the psalm, such as ver. 23, and possibly ver. 14. The psalmist seems to intend to insert such reference to man, the only toiler, in all his pictures. "Leviathan" is probably here the whale. Ewald, Hitzig, Baethgen, Kay, and Cheyne follow the LXX. and Vulgate in reading "Leviathan whom Thou hast formed to sport with him," and take the words to refer to Job xli. 5. The thought would then be that God's power can control the mightiest creatures' plunges; but "the two preceding 'there's are in favour of the usual interpretation, 'therein'" (Hupfeld), and consequently of taking the "sporting" to be that of the unwieldy gambols of the sea-monster.

Verses 27–30 mass all creatures of earth and sea, including man, as alike dependent on God for sustenance and for life. Dumbly these look expectant to Him, though man only knows to whom all living eyes

are directed. The swift clauses in vv. 28–30, without connecting particles, vividly represent the Divine acts as immediately followed by the creatural consequences. To this psalmist the links in the chain were of little consequence. His thoughts were fixed on its two ends—the Hand that sent its power thrilling through the links, and the result realised in the creature's life. All natural phenomena are issues of God's present will. Preservation is as much His act, as inexplicable without Him, as creation. There would be nothing to "gather" unless He "gave." All sorts of supplies, which make the "good" of physical life, are in His hand, whether they be the food of the wild asses by the streams, or of the conies among the cliffs, or of the young lions in the night, or of Leviathan tumbling amidst the waves, or of toiling man. Nor is it only the nourishment of life which comes straight from God to all, but life itself depends on His continual in-breathing. His face is creation's light; breath from Him is its life. The withdrawal of it is death. Every change in creatural condition is wrought by Him. He is the only Fountain of Life, and the reservoir of all the forces that minister to life or to inanimate being. But the psalmist will not end his contemplations with the thought of the fair creation returning to nothingness. Therefore he adds another verse (30); which tells of "life re-orient out of dust." Individuals pass; the type remains. New generations spring. The yearly miracle of Spring brings greenness over the snow-covered or brown pastures and green shoots from stiffened boughs. Many of last year's birds are dead, but there are nests in the cypresses, and twitterings among the branches in the wadies. Life, not death, prevails in God's world.

So the psalmist gathers all up into a burst of praise. He desires that the glory of God, which accrues to Him from His works, may ever be rendered through devout recognition of Him as working them all by man, the only creature who can be the spokesman of creation. He further desires that, as God at first saw that all was "very good," He may ever continue thus to rejoice in His works, or, in other words, that these may fulfil His purpose. Possibly His rejoicing in His works is regarded as following upon man's giving glory to Him for them. That rejoicing, which is the manifestation both of His love and of His satisfaction, is all the more desired, because, if His works do *not* please Him, there lies in Him a dread abyss of destructive power, which could sweep them into nothingness. Superficial readers may feel that the tone of ver. 32 strikes a discord, but it is a discord which can be resolved into deeper harmony. One frown from God, and the solid earth trembles, as conscious to its depths of His displeasure. One touch of the hand that is filled with good, and the mountains smoke. Creation perishes if He is displeased. Well then may the psalmist pray that He may for ever rejoice in His works, and make them live by His smile.

Very beautifully and profoundly does the psalmist ask, in vv. 33, 34, that some echo of the Divine joy may gladden his own heart, and that his praise may be coeval with God's glory and his own life. This is the Divine purpose in creation—that God may rejoice in it and chiefly in man its crown, and that man may rejoice in Him. Such sweet commerce is possible between heaven and earth; and they have learned the lesson of creative power and love aright who by it have been led to share in the joy of God. The psalm

has been shaped in part by reminiscences of the creative days of creation. It ends with the Divine Sabbath, and with the prayer, which is also a hope, that man may enter into God's rest.

But there is one discordant note in creation's full-toned hymn, "the fair music that all creatures made." There are sinners on earth; and the last prayer of the psalmist is that that blot may be removed, and so nothing may mar the realisation of God's ideal, nor be left to lessen the completeness of His delight in His work. And so the psalm ends, as it began, with the singer's call to his own soul to bless Jehovah.

This is the first psalm which closes with Hallelujah (Praise Jehovah). It is appended to the two following psalms, which close Book IV., and is again found in Book V., in Psalms cxi.–cxiii., cxv.–cxvii., and in the final group, Psalms cxlvi.–cl. It is probably a liturgical addition.

PSALM CV.

1 Give thanks to Jehovah, call on His name,
Make known among the peoples His deeds.
2 Sing to Him, harp to Him,
Speak musingly of all His wonders.
3 Glory in His holy name,
Glad be the heart of them that seek Jehovah!
4 Inquire after Jehovah and His strength,
Seek His face continually.
5 Remember His wonders which He has done,
His marvels and the judgments of His mouth.
6 O seed of Abraham His servant,
Sons of Jacob, His chosen ones.

7 He, Jehovah, is our God,
In all the earth are His judgments.
8 He remembers His covenant for ever,
The word which He commanded for a thousand generations;
9 Which He made with Abraham,
And His oath to Isaac.
10 And He established it with Jacob for a statute,
To Israel for an everlasting covenant,
11 Saying, "To thee will I give the land of Canaan,
[As] your measured allotment;"
12 Whilst they were easily counted,
Very few, and but sojourners therein;
13 And they went about from nation to nation,
From [one] kingdom to another people.
14 He suffered no man to oppress them,
And reproved kings for their sakes;
15 [Saying], "Touch not Mine anointed ones,
And to My prophets do no harm."

16 And He called for a famine on the land,
Every staff of bread He broke.
17 He sent before them a man,
For a slave was Joseph sold.

18 They afflicted his feet with the fetter,
He was put in irons.
19 Till the time [when] his word came [to pass],
The promise of Jehovah tested him.
20 The king sent and loosed him,
The ruler of peoples, and let him go.
21 He made him lord over his house,
And ruler over all his substance;
22 To bind princes at his pleasure,
And to make his elders wise.

23 So Israel came to Egypt,
And Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
24 And He made His people fruitful exceedingly,
And made them stronger than their foes.
25 He turned their heart to hate His people,
To deal craftily with His servants.
26 He sent Moses His servant,
[And] Aaron whom He had chosen.
27 They set [forth] among them His signs,
And wonders in the land of Ham.

28 He sent darkness, and made it dark,
And they rebelled not against His words.
29 He turned their waters to blood,
And slew their fish.
30 Their land swarmed [with] frogs,
In the chambers of their kings.
31 He spake and the gad-fly came,
Gnats in all their borders.
32 He gave hail [for] their rains,
Flaming fire in their land.
33 And He smote their vine and their fig-tree,
And broke the trees of their borders.
34 He spoke and the locust came,
And caterpillar-locusts without number,
35 And ate up every herb in their land,
And ate up the fruit of their ground.
36 And He smote every first-born in their land,
The firstlings of all their strength.
37 And He brought them out with silver and gold,
And there was not one among His tribes who stumbled.
38 Glad was Egypt at their departure,
For the fear of them had fallen upon them.

39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
And fire to light the night.
40 They asked and He brought quails,
And [with] bread from heaven He satisfied them.
41 He opened the rock and forth gushed waters,
They flowed through the deserts, a river.
42 For He remembered His holy word,
[And] Abraham His servant;
43 And He brought out His people [with] joy,
With glad cries His chosen [ones];
44 And He gave them the lands of the nations,
And they took possession of the toil of the peoples,
45 To the end that they might observe His statutes,
And keep His laws.
Hallelujah!

IT is a reasonable conjecture that the Hallelujah at the end of Psalm civ., where it is superfluous, properly belongs to this psalm, which would then be assimilated to Psalm cvi., which is obviously a companion psalm. Both are retrospective and didactic; but Psalm cv. deals entirely with God's unfailing faithfulness to Israel, while Psalm cvi. sets forth the sad contrast presented by Israel's continual faithlessness to God. Each theme is made more impressive by being pursued separately, and then set over against the other. The long series of God's mercies massed together here confronts the dark uniformity of Israel's unworthy requital of them there. Half of the sky is pure blue and radiant sunshine; half is piled with unbroken clouds. Nothing drives home the consciousness of sin so surely as contemplation of God's loving acts. Probably this psalm, like others of similar contents, is of late date. The habit of historical retrospect for religious purposes is likely to belong to times remote from the events recorded. Vv. 1–15 are found in 1 Chron. xvi. as part of the hymn at David's setting

up of the Ark on Zion. But that hymn is unmistakably a compilation from extant psalms, and cannot be taken as deciding the Davidic authorship of the psalm.

Vv. 1–6 are a ringing summons to extol and contemplate God's great deeds for Israel. They are full of exultation, and, in their reiterated short clauses, are like the joyful cries of a herald bringing good tidings to Zion. There is a beautiful progress of thought in these verses. They begin with the call to thank and praise Jehovah and to proclaim His doings among the people. That recognition of Israel's office as the world's evangelist does not require the supposition that the nation was dispersed in captivity, but simply shows that the singer understood the reason for the long series of mercies heaped on it. It is significant that God's "deeds" are Israel's message to the world. By such deeds His "name" is spoken. What God has done is the best revelation of what God is. His messengers are not to speak their own thoughts about Him, but to tell the story of His acts and let these speak for Him. Revelation is not a set of propositions, but a history of Divine facts. The foundation of audible praise and proclamation is contemplation. Therefore the exhortation in ver. 2*b* follows, which means not merely "speak," but may be translated, as in margin of the Revised Version, "meditate," and is probably best rendered so as to combine both ideas, "musingly speak." Let not the words be mere words, but feel the great deeds which you proclaim. In like manner, ver. 3 calls upon the heralds to "glory" for themselves in the name of Jehovah, and to make efforts to possess Him more fully and to rejoice in finding Him. Aspiration after clearer and closer knowledge and experience of God should ever underlie glad pealing forth of His

name. If it does not, eloquent tongues will fall silent, and Israel's proclamation will be cold and powerless. To seek Jehovah is to find His strength investing our feebleness. To turn our faces towards His in devout desire is to have our faces made bright by reflected light. And one chief way of seeking Jehovah is the remembrance of His merciful wonders of old, "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered" (Psalm cxi. 4), and His design in them is that men should have solid basis for their hopes, and be thereby encouraged to seek Him, as well as be taught what He is. Thus the psalmist reaches his main theme, which is to build a memorial of these deeds for an everlasting possession. The "wonders" referred to in ver. 5 are chiefly those wrought in Egypt, as the subsequent verses show.

Ver. 6 contains, in the names given to Israel, the reason for their obeying the preceding summonses. Their hereditary relation to God gives them the material, and imposes on them the obligation and the honour, of being "secretaries of God's praise." In ver. 6*a* "His servant" may be intended to designate the nation, as it often does in Isa. xl.–lxvi. "His chosen ones" in ver. 6*b* would then be an exact parallel; but the recurrence of the expression in ver. 42, with the individual reference, makes that reference more probable here.

The fundamental fact underlying all Israel's experience of God's care is His own loving will, which, self-moved, entered into covenant obligations, so that thereafter His mercies are ensured by His veracity, no less than by His kindness. Hence the psalm begins its proper theme by hymning the faithfulness of God to His oath, and painting the insignificance of the beginnings of the nation, as showing that the ground of

God's covenant relation was laid in Himself, not in them. Israel's consciousness of holding a special relation to God never obscured, in the minds of psalmists and prophets, the twin truth that all the earth waited on Him, and was the theatre of His manifestations. Baser souls might hug themselves on their prerogative. The nobler spirits ever confessed that it laid on them duties to the world, and that God had not left Himself without witness in any land. These two truths have often been rent asunder, both in Israel and in Christendom, but each needs the other for its full comprehension. "Jehovah is our God" may become the war-cry of bitter hostility to them that are without, or of contempt, which is quite as irreligious. "In all the earth are His judgments" may lead to a vague theism, incredulous of special revelation. He who is most truly penetrated with the first will be most joyfully ready to proclaim the second of these sister-thoughts, and will neither shut up all God's mercies within the circle of revelation, nor lose sight of His clearest utterances while looking on His more diffused and less perfect ones.

The obligations under which God has come to Israel are represented as a covenant, a word and an oath. In all the general idea of explicit declaration of Divine purpose, which henceforth becomes binding on God by reason of His faithfulness, is contained; but the conception of a *covenant* implies mutual obligations, failure to discharge which on one side relieves the other contracting party from his promise, while that of a *word* simply includes the notion of articulate utterance, and that of an *oath* adds the thought of a solemn sanction and a pledge given. God swears by Himself —that is, His own character is the guarantee of His

promise. These various designations are thus heaped together, in order to heighten the thought of the firmness of His promise. It stands "for ever," "to a thousand generations"; it is an "everlasting covenant." The psalmist triumphs, as it were, in the manifold repetition of it. Each of the fathers of the nation had it confirmed to himself,—Abraham; Isaac when, ready to flee from the land in famine, he had renewed to him (Gen. xxvi. 3) the oath which he had first heard as he stood, trembling but unharmed, by the rude altar where the ram lay in his stead (Gen. xxii. 16); Jacob as he lay beneath the stars at Bethel. With Jacob (Israel) the singer passes from the individuals to the nation, as is shown by the alternation of "thee" and "you" in ver. 11.

The lowly condition of the recipients of the promise not only exalts the love which chose them, but the power which preserved them and fulfilled it. And if, as may be the case, the psalm is exilic or post-exilic, its picture of ancient days is like a mirror, reflecting present depression and bidding the downcast be of good cheer. He who made a strong nation out of that little horde of wanderers must have been moved by His own heart, not by anything in them; and what He did long ago He can do to-day. God's past is the prophecy of God's future. Literally rendered, ver. 12*a* runs "Whilst they were men of number," *i.e.*, easily numbered (Gen. xxxiv. 30, where Jacob uses the same phrase). "Very few" in *b* is literally "like a little," and may either apply to number or to worth. It is used in the latter sense, in reference to "the heart of the wicked," in Prov. x. 20, and may have the same meaning here. That little band of wanderers, who went about as sojourners among the kinglets of Canaan and Philistia,

with occasional visits to Egypt, seemed very vulnerable; but God was, as He had promised to the first of them at a moment of extreme peril, their "shield," and in their lives there were instances of strange protection afforded them, which curbed kings, as in the case of Abram in Egypt (Gen. xii.) and Gerar (Gen. xx.), and of Isaac in the latter place (Gen. xxvi.). The patriarchs were not, technically speaking, "anointed," but they had that of which anointing was but a symbol. They were Divinely set apart and endowed for their tasks, and, as consecrated to God's service, their persons were inviolable. In a very profound sense all God's servants are thus anointed, and are "immortal till their work is done." "Prophets" in the narrower sense of the word the patriarchs were not, but Abraham is called so by God in one of the places already referred to (Gen. xx. 7). Prior to prophetic utterance is prophetic inspiration; and these men received Divine communications, and were, in a special degree, possessed of the counsels of Heaven. The designation is equivalent to Abraham's name of the "friend of God." Thus both titles, which guaranteed a charmed, invulnerable life to their bearers, go deep into the permanent privileges of God-trusting souls. All such "have an anointing from the Holy One," and receive whispers from His lips. They are all under the ægis of His protection, and for their sakes kings of many a dynasty and age have been rebuked.

In vv. 16–22 the history of Joseph is poetically and summarily treated, as a link in the chain of providences which brought about the fulfilment of the Covenant. Possibly the singer is thinking about a captive Israel in the present, while speaking about a captive Joseph in the past. In God's dealings humiliation and afflic-

tion are often, he thinks, the precursors of glory and triumph. Calamities prepare the way for prosperity. So it was in that old time; and so it is still. In this *résumé* of the history of Joseph, the points signalised are God's direct agency in the whole—the errand on which Joseph was sent ("before them") as a forerunner to "prepare a place for them," the severity of his sufferings, the trial of his faith by the contrast which his condition presented to what God had promised, and his final exaltation. The description of Joseph's imprisonment adds some dark touches to the account in Genesis, whether these are due to poetic idealising or to tradition. In ver. 18 *b* some would translate "Iron came over his soul." So Delitzsch, following the Vulgate ("Ferrum pertransiit animam ejus"), and the picturesque Prayer-Book Version, "The iron entered into his soul." But the original is against this, as the word for *iron* is masculine and the verb is feminine, agreeing with the feminine noun *soul*. The clause is simply a parallel to the preceding. "His soul" is best taken as a mere periphrasis for *he*, though it may be used emphatically to suggest that "his soul entered, whole and entire, in its resolve to obey God, into the cruel torture" (Kay). The meaning is conveyed by the free rendering above.

Ver. 19 is also ambiguous, from the uncertainty as to whose word is intended in *a*. It may be either God's or Joseph's. The latter is the more probable, as there appears to be an intentional contrast between "His word" in *a*, and "the promise of Jehovah" in *b*. If this explanation is adopted, a choice is still possible between Joseph's interpretation of his fellow-prisoners' dreams, the fulfilment of which led to his liberation, and his earlier word recounting his own dreams, which

led to his being sold by his brethren. In any case, the thought of the verse is a great and ever true one, that God's promise, while it remains unfulfilled, and seems contradicted by present facts, serves as a test of the genuineness and firmness of a man's reliance on Him and it. That promise is by the psalmist almost personified, as putting Joseph to the test. Such testing is the deepest meaning of all afflictions. Fire will burn off a thin plating of silver from a copper coin and reveal the base metal beneath, but it will only brighten into a glow the one which is all silver.

There is a ring of triumph in the singer's voice as he tells of the honour and power heaped on the captive, and of how the king of many nations "sent," as the mightier King in heaven had done (vv. 20 and 17), and not only liberated but exalted him, giving him, whose soul had been bound in fetters, power to "bind princes according to his soul," and to instruct and command the elders of Egypt.

Vv. 23–27 carry on the story to the next step in the evolution of God's purposes. The long years of the sojourn in Egypt are summarily dealt with, as they are in the narrative in Genesis and Exodus, and the salient points of its close alone are touched—the numerical growth of the people, the consequent hostility of the Egyptians, and the mission of Moses and Aaron. The direct ascription to God of all the incidents mentioned is to be noted. The psalmist sees only one hand moving, and has no hesitation in tracing to God the turning of the Egyptians' hearts to hatred. Many commentators, both old and new, try to weaken the expression, by the explanation that the hatred was "indirectly the work of God, inasmuch as He lent increasing might to the people" (Delitzsch). But the psalmist means

much more than this, just as Exodus does in attributing the hardening of Pharaoh's heart to God.

Ver. 27, according to the existing text, breaks the series of verses beginning with a singular verb of which God is the subject, which stretch with only one other interruption from ver. 24 to ver. 37. It seems most probable, therefore, that the LXX. is right in reading *He* instead of *They*. The change is but the omission of one letter, and the error supposed is a frequent one. The word literally means *set* or *planted*, and *did* is an explanation rather than a rendering. The whole expression is remarkable. Literally, we should translate "He" (or "They") "set among them words" (or "matters") "of His signs"; but this would be unintelligible, and we must have recourse to reproduction of the meaning rather than of the words.

If "words of His signs" is not merely pleonastic, it may be rendered, as by Kay, "His long record of signs," or as by Cheyne, "His varied signs." But it is better to take the expression as suggesting that the *miracles* were indeed *words*, as being declarations of God's will and commands to let His people go. The phrase in ver. 5, "the judgments of His mouth," would then be roughly parallel. God's deeds are words. His signs have tongues. "He speaks and it is done"; but also, "He does and it is spoken." The expression, however, may be like Psalm lxv. 4, where the same form of phrase is applied to sins, and where it seems to mean "deeds of iniquity." It would then mean here "His works which were signs."

The following enumeration of the "signs" does not follow the order in Exodus, but begins with the ninth plague, perhaps because of its severity, and then in the main adheres to the original sequence, though it inverts

the order of the third and forth plagues (flies and gnats or mosquitoes, not "lice") and omits the fifth and sixth. The reason for this divergence is far from clear, but it may be noted that the first two in the psalmist's order attack the elements; the next three (frogs, flies, gnats) have to do with animal life; and the next two (hail and locusts), which embrace both these categories, are considered chiefly as affecting vegetable products. The emphasis is laid in all on God's direct act. *He* sends darkness, *He* turns the waters into blood, and so on. The only other point needing notice in these verses is the statement in ver. 28 *b*. "They rebelled not against His word," which obviously is true only in reference to Moses and Aaron, who shrank not from their perilous embassage.

The tenth plague is briefly told, for the psalm is hurrying on to the triumphant climax of the Exodus, when, enriched with silver and gold, the tribes went forth, strong for their desert march, and Egypt rejoiced to see the last of them, "for they said, We be all dead men" (Exod. xii. 33). There may be a veiled hope in this exultant picture of the Exodus, that present oppression will end in like manner. The wilderness sojourn is so treated in ver. 39 *sqq*. as to bring into sight only the leading instances, sung in many psalms, of God's protection, without one disturbing reference to the sins and failures which darkened the forty years. These are spread out at length, without flattery or minimising, in the next psalm; but here the theme is God's wonders. Therefore, the pillar of cloud which guided, covered, and illumined the camp, the miracles which provided food and water, are touched on in vv. 39–41, and then the psalmist gathers up the lessons which he would teach in three great thoughts. The reason for God's merciful

dealings with His people is His remembrance of His covenant, and of His servant Abraham, whose faith made a claim on God, for the fulfilment which would vindicate it. That covenant has been amply fulfilled, for Israel came forth with ringing songs, and took possession of lands which they had not tilled, and houses which they had not built. The purpose of covenant and fulfilment is that the nation, thus admitted into special relations with God, should by His mercies be drawn to keep His commandments, and in obedience find rest and closer fellowship with its God. The psalmist had learned that God gives before He demands or commands, and that "Love," springing from grateful reception of His benefits, "is the fulfilling of the Law." He anticipates the full Christian exhortation, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice."

PSALM CVI.

1 Hallelujah!
Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His loving-kindness [endures] for ever.
2 Who can speak forth the mighty deeds of Jehovah,
[Who] can cause all His praise to be heard?
3 Blessed are they who observe right,
He who does righteousness at all times.
4 Remember me, Jehovah, with the favour which Thou bearest to Thy people,
Visit me with Thy salvation;
5 That I may look on the prosperity of Thy chosen ones,
That I may joy in the joy of Thy nation,
That I may triumph with Thine inheritance.

6 We have sinned with our fathers,
We have done perversely, have done wickedly.
7 Our fathers in Egypt considered not Thy wonders,
They remembered not the multitude of Thy loving-kindnesses,
And rebelled at the Sea, by the Red Sea.
8 And He saved them for His name's sake,
To make known His might;
9 And He rebuked the Red Sea and it was dried up,
And He led them in the depths as in a wilderness;
10 And He saved them from the hand of the hater,
And redeemed them from the hand of the enemy;
11 And the waters covered their oppressors,
Not one of them was left;
12 And they believed on His words,
They sang His praise.

13 They hasted [and] forgot His works,
They waited not for His counsel;
14 And they lusted a lust in the wilderness,
And tempted God in the desert;

15 And He gave them what they asked for,
And sent wasting sickness into their soul.
16 They were jealous against Moses in the camp,
Against Aaron, the holy one of Jehovah.
17 The earth opened and swallowed Dathan,
And covered the company of Abiram;
18 And fire blazed out on their company,
Flame consumed the wicked ones.

19 They made a calf in Horeb,
And bowed down to a molten image;
20 And they changed their Glory
For the likeness of a grass-eating ox.
21 They forgot God their Saviour,
Who did great things in Egypt,
22 Wonders in the land of Ham,
Dread things by the Red Sea.
23 And He said that He would annihilate them,
Had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach confronting Him
To turn His anger from destroying.

24 And they despised the delightsome land,
They trusted not to His word;
25 And they murmured in their tents
They hearkened not to the voice of Jehovah;
26 And He lifted up His hand to them, [swearing]
That He would make them fall in the wilderness.
27 And that He would make their seed fall among the nations,
And scatter them in the lands.

28 And they yoked themselves to Baal-Peor,
And ate the sacrifices of dead [gods];
29 And they provoked Him by their doings,
And a plague broke in upon them;
30 And Phinehas stood up and did judgment,
And the plague was stayed;
31 And it was reckoned to him for righteousness,
To generation after generation, for ever.

32 And they moved indignation at the waters of Meribah,
And it fared ill with Moses on their account.
33 For they rebelled against [His] Spirit,
And he spoke rashly with his lips.

34 They destroyed not the peoples
[Of] whom Jehovah spoke to them;
35 And they mixed themselves with the nations
And learned their works;
36 And they served their idols
And they became to them a snare;
37 And they sacrificed their sons
And their daughters to demons;
38 And they shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters,
Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,
And the land was profaned by bloodshed.
39 And they became unclean through their works,
And committed whoredom through their doings.

40 And the anger of Jehovah kindled on His people,
And He abhorred His inheritance;
41 And He gave them into the hand of the nations,
And their haters lorded it over them;
42 And their enemies oppressed them,
And they were bowed down under their hand.
43 Many times did He deliver them,
And they—they rebelliously followed their own counsel,
And were brought low through their iniquity;
44 And He looked on their distress
When He heard their cry;
45 And He remembered for them His covenant,
And repented according to the multitude of His loving-kindness,
46 And caused them to find compassion,
In the presence of all their captors.

47 Save us, Jehovah, our God,
And gather us from among the nations,
That we may thank Thy holy name,
That we may make our boast in Thy praise.

48 Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel,
From everlasting and to everlasting,
And let all the people say Amen.
Hallelujah!

THE history of God's past is a record of continuous mercies, the history of man's, one of as continuous sin. The memory of the former quickened the psalmist

into his sunny song of thankfulness in the previous psalm. That of the latter moves him to the confessions in this one. They are complements of each other, and are connected not only as being both retrospective, but by the identity of their beginnings and the difference of their points of view. The parts of the early history dealt with in the one are lightly touched or altogether omitted in the other. The key-note of Psalm cv. is, "Remember His mighty deeds"; that of Psalm cvi. is, "They forgot His mighty deeds."

Surely never but in Israel has patriotism chosen a nation's sins for the themes of song, or, in celebrating its victories, written but one name, the name of Jehovah, on its trophies. But in the Psalter we have several instances of such hymns of national confession; and, in other books, there are the formulary at the presentation of the first-fruits (Deut. xxvi.), Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings viii.), Nehemiah's prayer (Neh. ix.), and Daniel's (Dan. ix.).

An exilic date is implied by the prayer of ver. 47, for the gathering of the people from among the nations. The occurrence of vv. 1 and 47, 48, in the compilation in 1 Chron. xvi. shows that this psalm, which marks the close of the Fourth Book, was in existence prior to the date of 1 Chronicles.

No trace of strophical arrangement is discernible. But, after an introduction in some measure like that in Psalm cv., the psalmist plunges into his theme, and draws out the long, sad story of Israel's faithlessness. He recounts seven instances during the wilderness sojourn (vv. 7–33), and then passes to those occurring in the Land (vv. 34–39), with which he connects the alternations of punishment and relenting on God's part and the obstinacy of transgression on Israel's, even

down to the moment in which he speaks (vv. 40–46). The whole closes with a prayer for restoration to the Land (ver. 47); to which is appended the doxology (ver. 48), the mark of the end of Book IV., and not a part of the psalm.

The psalmist preludes his confession and contemplation of his people's sins by a glad remembrance of God's goodness and enduring loving-kindness and by a prayer for himself. Some commentators regard these introductory verses as incongruous with the tone of the psalm, and as mere liturgical commonplace, which has been tacked on without much heed to fitness. But surely the thought of God's unspeakable goodness most appropriately precedes the psalmist's confession, for nothing so melts a heart in penitence as the remembrance of God's love, and nothing so heightens the evil of sin as the consideration of the patient goodness which it has long flouted. The blessing pronounced in ver. 3 on those who "do righteousness" and keep the law is not less natural, before a psalm which sets forth in melancholy detail the converse truth of the misery that dogs breaking the law.

In vv. 4, 5, the psalmist interjects a prayer for himself, the abruptness of which strongly reminds us of similar jets of personal supplication in Nehemiah. The determination to make the "I" of the Psalter the nation perversely insists on that personification here, in spite of the clear distinction thrice drawn in ver. 5 between the psalmist and his people. The "salvation" in which he desires to share is the deliverance from exile for which he prays in the closing verse of the psalm. There is something very pathetic in this momentary thought of self. It breathes wistful yearning, absolute confidence in the unrealised deliverance,

lowly humility which bases its claim with God on that of the nation. Such a prayer stands in the closest relation to the theme of the psalm, which draws out the dark record of national sin, in order to lead to that national repentance which, as all the history shows, is the necessary condition of "the prosperity of Thy chosen ones." Precisely because the hope of restoration is strong, the delineation of sin is unsparing.

With ver. 6 the theme of the psalm is given forth, in language which recalls Solomon's and Daniel's similar confessions (1 Kings viii. 47; Dan. ix. 5). The accumulation of synonyms for sin witnesses at once to the gravity and manifoldness of the offences, and to the earnestness and comprehensiveness of the acknowledgment. The remarkable expression "We have sinned *with* our fathers" is not to be weakened to mean merely that the present generation had sinned like their ancestors, but gives expression to the profound sense of national solidarity, which speaks in many other places of Scripture, and rests on very deep facts in the life of nations and their individual members. The enumeration of ancestral sin begins with the murmurings of the faint-hearted fugitives by the Red Sea. In Psalm cv. the wonders in Egypt were dilated on and the events at the Red Sea unmentioned. Here the signs in Egypt are barely referred to and treated as past at the point where the psalm begins, while the incidents by the Red Sea fill a large space in the song. Clearly, the two psalms supplement each other. The reason given for Israel's rebellion in Psalm cvi. is its forgetfulness of God's mighty deeds (ver. 7 *a*, *b*), while in Psalm cv. the remembrance of these is urgently enjoined. Thus, again, the connection of thought in the pair of psalms is evident. Every man

has experiences enough of God's goodness stored away in the chambers of his memory to cure him of distrust, if he would only look at them. But they lie unnoticed, and so fear has sway over him. No small part of the discipline needed for vigorous hope lies in vigorous exercise of remembrance. The drying up of the Red Sea is here poetically represented, with omission of Moses' outstretched rod and the strong east wind, as the immediate consequence of God's omnipotent rebuke. Ver. 9*b* is from Isa. lxiii. 13, and picturesquely describes the march through that terrible gorge of heaped-up waters as being easy and safe, as if it had been across some wide-stretching plain, with springy turf to tread on. The triumphant description of the completeness of the enemies' destruction in ver. 11*b* is from Exod. xiv. 28, and "they believed on His words" is in part quoted from Exod. xiv. 31, while Miriam's song is referred to in ver. 12*b*.

The next instance of departure is the lusting for food (vv. 13–15). Again the evil is traced to forgetfulness of God's doings, to which in ver. 13*b* is added impatient disinclination to wait the unfolding of His counsel or plan. These evils cropped up with strange celerity. The memory of benefits was transient, as if they had been written on the blown sands of the desert. "They hasted, they forgot His works." Of how many of us that has to be said! We remember pain and sorrow longer than joy and pleasure. It is always difficult to bridle desires and be still until God discloses His purposes. We are all apt to try to force His hand open, and to impose our wishes on Him, rather than to let His will mould us. So, on forgetfulness and impatience there followed then, as there follow still, eager longings after material good and a

tempting of God. "They lusted a lust" is from Num. xi. 4. "Tempted God" is found in reference to the same incident in the other psalm of historical retrospect (lxxviii. 18). He is "tempted" when unbelief demands proofs of His power, instead of waiting patiently for Him. In Num. xi. 33 Jehovah is said to have smitten the people "with a very great plague." The psalm specifies more particularly the nature of the stroke by calling it "wasting sickness," which invaded the life of the sinners. The words are true in a deeper sense, though not so meant. For whoever sets his hot desires in self-willed fashion on material good, and succeeds in securing their gratification, gains with the satiety of his lower sense the loss of a shrivelled spiritual nature. Full-fed flesh makes starved souls.

The third instance is the revolt headed by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against the exclusive Aaronic priesthood (vv. 16–18). It was rebellion against God, for He had set apart Aaron as His own, and therefore the unusual title of "the holy one of Jehovah" is here given to the high priest. The expression recalls the fierce protest of the mutineers, addressed to Moses and Aaron, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy" (Num. xvi. 3); and also Moses' answer, "Jehovah will show . . . who is holy." Envy often masquerades as the champion of the rights of the community, when it only wishes to grasp these for itself. These aristocratic democrats cared nothing for the prerogatives of the nation, though they talked about them. They wanted to pull down Aaron, not to lift up Israel. Their end is described with stern brevity, in language coloured by the narrative in Numbers, from which the phrases "opened" (*i.e.*, her mouth) and "covered" are drawn. Korah is not mentioned

here, in which the psalm follows Num. xvi. and Deut. xi. 6, whereas Num. xxvi. 10 includes Korah in the destruction. The difficulty does not seem to have received any satisfactory solution. But Cheyne is too peremptory when he undertakes to divine the reason for the omission of Korah here and in Deut. xi. 6, "because he was a Levite and his name was dear to temple-poets." Such clairvoyance as to motives is beyond ordinary vision. In ver. 18 the fate of the two hundred and fifty "princes of Israel" who took part in the revolt is recorded as in Num. xvi. 35.

The worship of the calf is the fourth instance (vv. 19–23) in the narrative of which the psalmist follows Exod. xxxii., but seems also to have Deut. ix. 8–12 floating in his mind, as appears from the use of the name "Horeb," which is rare in Exodus and frequent in Deuteronomy. Ver. 20 is apparently modelled on Jer. ii. 11: "My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." Compare also Paul's "*changed* the *glory* of the incorruptible God for the *likeness*," etc. (Rom. i. 23). "His glory" is read instead "their glory" by Noldeke, Graetz, and Cheyne, following an old Jewish authority. The LXX., in Codd. Alex. and Sin. (second hand), has this reading, and Paul seems to follow it in the passage just quoted. It yields a worthy meaning, but the existing text is quite appropriate. It scarcely means that God was the source of Israel's glory or their boast, for the word is not found in that sense. It is much rather the name for the collective attributes of the revealed Godhead, and is here substantially equivalent to "their God," that lustrous Light which, in a special manner, belonged to the people of revelation, on whom its first and brightest beams shone. The strange perverseness

which turned away from such a radiance of glory to bow down before an idol is strikingly set forth by the figure of bartering it for an image, and that of an ox that ate grass. The one true Substance given away for a shadow! The lofty Being whose light filled space surrendered: and for what? A brute that had to feed, and that on herbage! Men usually make a profit, or think they do, on their barter: but what do they gain by exchanging God for anything? Yet *we* keep making the same mistake of parting with Substance for shadows. And the reason which moved Israel is still operative. As before, the psalmist traces their mad apostasy to forgetfulness of God's deeds. The list of these is now increased by the addition of those at the Red Sea. With every step new links were added to the chain that should have bound the recipients of so many mercies to God. Therefore each new act of departure was of a darker hue of guilt, and drew on the apostates severer punishment, which also, rightly understood, was greater mercy.

"He said that He would annihilate them" is quoted from Deut. ix. 25. Moses' intercession for the people is here most vividly represented under the figure of a champion, who rushes into the breach by which the enemy is about to pour into some beleaguered town, and with his own body closes the gap and arrests the assault (cf. Ezek. xxii. 30).

The fifth instance is the refusal to go up to the land, which followed on the report of the spies (vv. 24–27). These verses are full of reminiscences of the Pentateuch and other parts of Scripture. "The delightsome land" (lit. "land of desire") is found in Jer. iii. 19 and Zech. vii. 14. "They despised" is from Num. xiv. 31. "They murmured in their tents" is from Deut. i. 27

(the only other place in which the word for murmuring occurs in this form). Lifting up the hand is used, as here, not in the usual sense of threatening to strike, but in that of swearing, in Exod. vi. 8, and the oath itself is given in Num. xiv. 28 *sqq.*, while the expression "lifted up My hand" occurs in that context, in reference to God's original oath to the patriarch. The threat of exile (ver. 27) does not occur in Numbers, but is found as the punishment of apostasy in Lev. xxvi. 33 and Deut. xxviii. 64. The verse, however, is found almost exactly in Ezek. xx. 23, with the exception that there "scatter" stands in *a* instead of *make to fall*. The difference in the Hebrew is only in the final letter of the words, and the reading in Ezekiel should probably be adopted here. So the LXX. and other ancient authorities and many of the moderns.

The sixth instance is the participation in the abominable Moabitish worship of "Baal-Peor," recorded in Num. xxv. The peculiar phrase "yoked themselves to" is taken from that chapter, and seems to refer to "the mystic, quasi-physical union supposed to exist between a god and his worshippers, and to be kept up by sacrificial meals" (Cheyne). These are called sacrifices of the dead, inasmuch as idols are dead in contrast with the living God. The judicial retribution inflicted according to Divine command by the judges of Israel slaying "every one his man" is here called a "plague," as in the foundation passage, Num. xxv. 9. The word (lit. "a stroke," *i.e.* from God) is usually applied to punitive sickness; but God smites when He bids men smite. Both the narrative in Numbers and the psalm bring out vividly the picture of the indignant Phinehas springing to his feet from the midst of the passive crowd. He "rose up," says the former; he "stood up," says

the latter. And his deed is described in the psalm in relation to its solemn judicial character, without particularising its details. The psalmist would partially veil both the sin and the horror of its punishment. Phinehas' javelin was a minister of God's justice, and the death of the two culprits satisfied that justice and stayed the plague. The word rendered "did judgment" has that meaning only, and such renderings as *mediated* or *appeased* give the effect of the deed and not the description of it contained in the word. "It was reckoned to him for righteousness," as Abraham's faith was (Gen. xv. 6). It was indeed an act which had its origin "in the faithfulness that had its root in faith, and which, for the sake of this its ultimate ground, gained him the acceptation of a righteous man, inasmuch as it proved him to be such" (Delitzsch, Eng. Trans.). He showed himself a true son of Abraham in the midst of these degenerate descendants, and it was the same impulse of faith which drove his spear, and which filled the patriarch's heart when he gazed into the silent sky and saw in its numberless lights the promise of his seed. Phinehas' reward was the permanence of the priesthood in his family.

The seventh instance is the rebellion at the waters of Meribah (Strife), in the fortieth year (Num. xx. 2–13). The chronological order is here set aside, for the events recorded in vv. 28–31 followed those dealt with in vv. 32, 33. The reason is probably that here Moses himself is hurried into sin, through the people's faithlessness, and so a climax is reached. The leader, long-tried, fell at last, and was shut out from entering the land. That was in some aspects the master-piece and triumph of the nation's sin. "It fared ill with Moses on their account," as in Deut. i. 37,

iii. 26, "Jehovah was angry with me for your sakes." "His Spirit," in ver. 33, is best taken as meaning the Spirit of God. The people's sin is repeatedly specified in the psalm as being rebellion against God, and the absence of a more distinct definition of the person referred to is like the expression in ver. 32, where "indignation" is that of God, though His name is not mentioned. Isa. lxiii. 10 is a parallel to this clause, as other parts of the same chapter are to other parts of the psalm. The question which has been often raised, as to what was Moses' sin, is solved in ver. 33 *b*, which makes his passionate words, wherein he lost his temper and arrogated to himself the power of fetching water from the rock, the head and front of his offending. The psalmist has finished his melancholy catalogue of sins in the wilderness with this picture of the great leader dragged down by the prevailing tone, and he next turns to the sins done in the land.

Two flagrant instances are given—disobedience to the command to exterminate the inhabitants, and the adoption of their bloody worship. The conquest of Canaan was partial; and, as often is the case, the conquerors were conquered and the invaders caught the manners of the invaded. Intermarriage poured a large infusion of alien blood into Israel; and the Canaanitish strain is perceptible to-day in the fellahin of the Holy Land. The proclivity to idolatry, which was natural in that stage of the world's history, and was intensified by universal example, became more irresistible, when reinforced by kinship and neighbourhood, and the result foretold was realised—the idols "became a snare" (Judg. ii. 1–3). The poet dwells with special abhorrence on the hideous practice of human sacrifices, which exercised so strong and

horrible a fascination over the inhabitants of Canaan. The word in ver. 37 *demons* is found only here and in Deut. xxxii. 17. The above rendering is that of the LXX. Its literal meaning seems to be "lords." It is thus a synonym for "Baalim." The epithet "Shaddai" exclusively applied to Jehovah may be compared.

In vv. 40–46 the whole history of Israel is summed up as alternating periods of sin, punishment, deliverance, recurring in constantly repeated cycles, in which the mystery of human obstinacy is set over against that of Divine long-suffering, and one knows not whether to wonder most at the incurable levity which learned nothing from experience, or the inexhaustible long-suffering which wearied not in giving wasted gifts. Chastisement and mercies were equally in vain. The outcome of God's many deliverances was, "they rebelled in their counsel"—*i.e.*, went on their own stiff-necked way, instead of waiting for and following God's merciful plan, which would have made them secure and blessed. The end of such obstinacy of disobedience can only be, "they were brought low through their iniquity." The psalmist appears to be quoting Lev. xxvi. 39, "they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity"; but he intentionally slightly alters the word, substituting one of nearly the same sound, but with the meaning of *being brought low* instead of *fading away*. To follow one's own will is to secure humiliation and degradation. Sin weakens the true strength and darkens the true glory of men.

In vv. 44–46 the singer rises from these sad and stern thoughts to recreate his spirit with the contemplation of the patient loving-kindness of God. It persists through all man's sin and God's anger. The multitude of its manifestations far outnumbers that of

our sins. His eye looks on Israel's distress with pity, and every sorrow on which He looks He desires to remove. Calamities melt away beneath His gaze, like damp-stains in sunlight. His merciful "look" swiftly follows the afflicted man's cry. No voice acknowledges sin and calls for help in vain. The covenant forgotten by men is none the less remembered by Him. The numberless number of His loving-kindnesses, greater than that of all men's sins, secures forgiveness after the most repeated transgressions. The law and measure of His "repenting" lie in the endless depths of His own heart. As the psalmist had sung at the beginning, that loving-kindness endures for ever; therefore none of Israel's many sins went unchastised, and no chastisement outlasted their repentance. Solomon had prayed that God would "give them compassion before those who carried them captive" (1 Kings viii. 50); and thus has it been, as the psalmist joyfully sees. He may have written when the Babylonian captivity was near an end, and such instances as those of Daniel or Nehemiah may have been in his mind. In any case, it is beautifully significant that a psalm, which tells the doleful story of centuries of faithlessness, should end with God's faithfulness to His promises, His inexhaustible forgiveness, and the multitude of His loving-kindnesses. Such will be the last result of the world's history no less than of Israel's.

The psalm closes with the prayer in ver. 47, which shows that it was written in exile. It corresponds in part with the closing words of Psalm cv. Just as there the purpose of God's mercies to Israel was said to be that they might be thereby moved to keep His statutes, so here the psalmist hopes and vows that

the issue of his people's restoration will be thankfulness to God's holy name, and triumphant pealing forth from ransomed lips of His high praises.

Ver. 48 is the concluding doxology of the Fourth Book. Some commentators suppose it an integral part of the psalm, but it is more probably an editorial addition.

BOOK V.

PSALMS CVII.—CL.

PSALM CVII.

1 Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His loving-kindness [endures] for ever.
2 Let the redeemed of Jehovah say [thus],
Whom He has redeemed from the gripe of distress,
3 And gathered them from the lands,
From east and west,
From north and from [the] sea.

4 They wandered in the wilderness, in a waste of a way,
An inhabited city they found not.
5 Hungry and thirsty,
Their soul languished within them,
6 And they cried to Jehovah in their distress,
From their troubles He delivered them,
7 And He led them by a straight way,
To go to an inhabited city.
8 Let them give thanks to Jehovah [for] His loving-kindness,
And His wonders to the sons of men.
9 For He satisfies the longing soul,
And the hungry soul He fills with good.

10 Those who sat in darkness and in deepest gloom,
Bound in affliction and iron,
11 Because they rebelled against the words of God,
And the counsel of the Most High they rejected.
12 And He brought down their heart with sorrow,
They stumbled, and helper there was none.
13 And they cried to Jehovah in their distress,
From their troubles He saved them.
14 He brought them out from darkness and deepest gloom,
And broke their bonds [asunder].
15 Let them give thanks to Jehovah [for] His loving-kindness,
And His wonders to the sons of men.
16 For He broke the doors of brass,
And the bars of iron He hewed in pieces.

17 Foolish men, because of the course of their transgression,
And because of their iniquities, brought on themselves affliction.
18 All food their soul loathed,
And they drew near to the gates of death.
19 And they cried to Jehovah in their distress,
From their troubles He saved them.
20 He sent His word and healed them,
And rescued them from their graves.
21 Let them give thanks to Jehovah [for] His loving-kindness
And His wonders to the sons of men.
22 And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
And tell His works with joyful joy.

23 They who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on the great waters,
24 They see the works of Jehovah,
And His wonders in the foaming deep.
25 And He spoke and raised a stormy wind,
Which rolled high the waves thereof.
26 They went up to the sky, they went down to the depths,
Their soul melted in trouble.
27 They went round and round and staggered like one drunk,
And all their wisdom forsook them [was swallowed up].
28 And they cried to Jehovah in their distress,
From their trouble He brought them out.
29 He stilled the storm into a light air,
And hushed were their waves.
30 And they were glad because these were quieted,
And He brought them to the haven of their desire.
31 Let them give thanks to Jehovah [for] His loving-kindness
And His wonders to the sons of men.
32 And let them exalt Him in the assembly of the people,
And praise Him in the session of the elders.

33 He turned rivers into a wilderness,
And water-springs into thirsty ground,
34 A land of fruit into a salt desert,
For the wickedness of the dwellers in it.
35 He turned a wilderness into a pool of water,
And a dry land into water-springs.
36 And He made the hungry to dwell there,
And they found an inhabited city.
37 And they sowed fields and planted vineyards,
And these yielded fruits of increase.

38 And He blessed them and they multiplied exceedingly,
And their cattle He diminished not.

39 And they were diminished and brought low,
By the pressure of ill and sorrow.
40 "He pours contempt on princes,
And makes them wander in a pathless waste."
41 He lifted the needy out of affliction,
And made families like a flock.
42 The upright see it and rejoice,
And all perverseness stops its mouth.

43 Whoso is wise, let him observe these things,
And let them understand the loving-kindnesses of Jehovah.

NOTWITHSTANDING the division of Books which separates Psalm cvii. from the two preceding, it is a pendant to these. The "gathering from among the heathen" prayed for in Psalm cvi. 41 has here come to pass (ver. 3). The thanksgiving which there is regarded as the purpose of that restoration is here rendered for it. Psalm cv. had for theme God's mercies to the fathers. Psalm cvi. confessed the hereditary faithlessness of Israel and its chastisement by calamity and exile. Psalm cvii. begins with summoning Israel as "the redeemed of Jehovah," to praise Him for His enduring loving-kindness in bringing them back from bondage, and then takes a wider flight, and celebrates the loving Providence which delivers, in all varieties of peril and calamity, those who cry to God. Its vivid pictures of distress and rescue begin, indeed, with one which may fairly be supposed to have been suggested by the incidents of the return from exile; and the second of these, that of the liberated prisoners, is possibly coloured by similar reminiscences; but the great restoration is only the starting-point, and the bulk of the psalm goes further afield. Its instances of Divine deliverance, though cast into narrative form, describe not specific

acts, but God's uniform way of working. Wherever there are trouble and trust, there will be triumph and praise. The psalmist is propounding a partial solution of the old problem—the existence of pain and sorrow. They come as chastisements. If terror or misery drive men to God, God answers, and deliverance is assured, from which fuller-toned praise should spring. It is by no means a complete vindication of Providence, and experience does not bear out the assumption of uniform answers to prayers for deliverance from external calamities, which was more warranted before Christ than it is now; but the essence of the psalmist's faith is ever true—that God hears the cry of a man driven to cry by crushing burdens, and will give him strength to bear and profit by them, even if He does not take them away.

The psalm passes before us a series of pictures, all alike in the disposition of their parts, and selected from the sad abundance of troubles which attack humanity. Travellers who have lost their way, captives, sick men, storm-tossed sailors, make a strangely miscellaneous company, the very unlikenesses of which suggest the width of the ocean of human misery. The artistic regularity of structure in all the four strophes relating to these cannot escape notice. But it is more than artistic. Whatever be a man's trouble, there is but one way out of it—to cry to God. That way is never vain. Always deliverance comes, and always the obligation of praise lies on the "redeemed of Jehovah."

With ver. 33 the psalm changes its structure. The refrains, which came in so strikingly in the preceding strophes, are dropped. The complete pictures give place to mere outline sketches. These diversities have suggested to some that vv. 33–43 are an excrescence;

but they have some points of connection with the preceding, such as the peculiar phrase for "inhabited city" (vv. 4, 5, 36), "hungry" (vv. 5, 36), and the fondness for references to Isaiah and Job. In these latter verses the psalmist does not describe deliverances from peril or pain, but the sudden alternations effected by Providence on lands and men, which pass from fertility and prosperity to barrenness and trouble, and again from these to their opposites. Loving-kindness, which hears and rescues, is the theme of the first part; loving-kindness, which "changes all things and is itself unchanged," is the theme of the second. Both converge on the final thought (ver. 43), that the observance of God's ways is the part of true wisdom, and will win the clear perception of the all-embracing "loving-kindness of Jehovah."

New mercies give new meaning to old praises. Fresh outpourings of thankfulness willingly run in well-worn channels. The children can repeat the fathers' doxology, and words hallowed by having borne the gratitude of many generations are the best vehicles for to-day's praise. Therefore, the psalm begins with venerable words, which it bids the recipients of God's last great mercy ring out once more. They who have yesterday been "redeemed from captivity" have proof that "His loving-kindness endures for ever," since it has come down to them through centuries. The characteristic fondness for quotations, which marks the psalm, is in full force in the three introductory verses. Ver. 1 is, of course, quoted from several psalms. "The redeemed of Jehovah" is from Isa. lxii. 12. "Gathered out of the lands" looks back to Psalm cvi. 47, and to many prophetic passages. The word rendered above "distress" may mean *oppressor*, and is frequently rendered so here,

which rendering fits better the preceding word "hand." But the recurrence of the same word in the subsequent refrains (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28) makes the rendering *distress* preferable here. To ascribe to *distress* a "hand" is poetical personification, or the latter word may be taken in a somewhat wider sense as equivalent to a grasp or grip, as above. The return from Babylon is evidently in the poet's thoughts, but he widens it out into a restoration from every quarter. His enumeration of the points from which the exiles flock is irregular, in that he says "from north and from the *sea*," which always means the Mediterranean, and stands for the west. That quarter has, however, already been mentioned, and, therefore, it has been supposed that sea here means, abnormally, the Red Sea, or "the southern portion of the Mediterranean." A textual alteration has also been proposed, which, by the addition of two letters to the word for *sea*, gives that for *south*. This reading would complete the enumeration of cardinal points; but possibly the psalmist is quoting Isa. xlix. 12, where the same phrase occurs, and the *north* is set over against the sea—*i.e.*, the west. The slight irregularity does not interfere with the picture of the streams of returning exiles from every quarter.

The first scene, that of a caravan lost in a desert, is probably suggested by the previous reference to the return of the "redeemed of Jehovah," but is not to be taken as referring only to that. It is a perfectly general sketch of a frequent incident of travel. It is a remarkable trace of a state of society very unlike modern life, that two of the four instances of "distress" are due to the perils of journeying. By land and by sea men took their lives in their hands, when they left their homes. Two points are signalised

in this description,—the first, the loss of the track; the second, the wanderers' hunger and thirst. "A waste of a way" is a singular expression, which has suggested various unnecessary textual emendations. It is like "a wild ass of a man" (Gen. xvi. 12), which several commentators quote as a parallel, and means a way which is desert (compare Acts viii. 26). The bewildered, devious march leads nowhither. Vainly the travellers look for some elevation,

> "From whence the lightened spirit sees
> That shady city of Palm Trees."

No place where men dwell appears in the wide expanse of pathless wilderness. The psalmist does not think of a particular city, but of any inhabited spot, where rest and shelter might be found. The water-skins are empty; food is finished; hopelessness follows physical exhaustion, and gloom wraps their souls; for ver. 5 *b*, literally translated, is, "Their soul covered itself"—*i.e.*, with despondency (Psalm lxxvii. 3).

The picture is not an allegory or a parable, but a transcript of a common fact. Still, one can scarcely help seeing in it a vivid representation of the inmost reality of a life apart from God. Such a life ever strays from the right road. "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to come to the city." The deepest needs of the soul are unsatisfied; and however outward good abounds, gnawing hunger and fierce thirst torment at times; and however mirth and success seem to smile, joys are superficial, and but mask a central sadness, as vineyards which clothe the outside of a volcano and lie above sulphurous fires.

The travellers are driven to God by their "distress." Happy they who, when lost in a desert, bethink them-

selves of the only Guide. He does not reject the cry which is forced out by the pressure of calamity; but, as the structure of vv. 6, 7, shows, His answer is simultaneous with the appeal to Him, and it is complete, as well as immediate. The track appears as suddenly as it had faded. God Himself goes at the head of the march. The path is straight as an arrow's flight, and soon they are in the city.

Ver. 6 is the first instance of the refrain, which, in each of the four pictures, is followed by a verse (or, in the last of the four, by two verses) descriptive of the act of deliverance, which again is followed by the second refrain, calling on those who have experienced such a mercy to thank Jehovah. This is followed in the first two groups by a verse reiterating the reason for praise—namely, the deliverance just granted; and, in the last two, by a verse expanding the summons. Various may be the forms of need. But the supply of them all is one, and the way to get it is one, and one is the experience of the suppliants, and one should be their praise. Life's diversities have underlying them identity of soul's wants. Waiters on God have very different outward fortunes, but the broad outlines of their inward history are identical. This is the law of His providence—they cry, He delivers. This should be the harvest from His sowing of benefits—"Let them give thanks to Jehovah." Some would translate ver. 8, "Let them thankfully confess to Jehovah His loving-kindness, and to the children of men [confess] His wonders"; but the usual rendering as above is better, as not introducing a thought which, however important, is scarcely in the psalmist's view here, and as preserving the great thought of the psalm—namely, that of God's providence to all mankind.

The second scene, that of captives, probably retains some allusion to Babylon, though an even fainter one than in the preceding strophe. It has several quotations and references to Isaiah, especially to the latter half (Isa. xl.–lxvi.). The deliverance is described in ver. 16 in words borrowed from the prophecy as to Cyrus, the instrument of Israel's restoration (Isa. xlv. 2). The gloom of the prison-house is described in language closely resembling Isa. xlii. 7, xlix. 9. The combination of "darkness and the shade of deepest gloom" is found in Isa. ix. 2. The cause of the captivity described is rebellion against God's counsel and word. These things point to Israel's Babylonian bondage; but the picture in the psalm draws its colour rather than its subject from that event, and is quite general. The psalmist thinks that such bondage, and deliverance on repentance and prayer, are standing facts in Providence, both as regards nations and individuals. One may see, too, a certain parabolic aspect hinted at, as if the poet would have us catch a half-revealed intention to present calamity of any kind under this image of captivity. We note the slipping in of words that are not required for the picture, as when the fetters are said to be "affliction" as well as "iron." Ver. 12, too, is not specially appropriate to the condition of prisoners; persons in fetters and gloom do not *stumble*, for they do not move. There may, therefore, be a half-glance at the parabolic aspect of captivity, such as poetic imagination, and especially Oriental poetry, loves. At most it is a delicate suggestion, shyly hiding while it shows itself, and made too much of if drawn out in prosaic exposition.

We may perceive also the allegorical pertinence of

this second picture, though we do not suppose that the singer intended such a use. For is not godless life ever bondage? and is not rebellion against God the sure cause of falling under a harsher dominion? and does He not listen to the cry of a soul that feels the slavery of subjection to self and sin? and is not true enlargement found in His free service? and does He not give power to break the strongest chains of habit? The synagogue at Nazareth, where the carpenter's Son stood up to read and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me. . . . He hath sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives," warrants the symbolical use of the psalmist's imagery, which is, as we have seen, largely influenced by the prophet whose words Jesus quoted. The first scene taught that devout hearts never lack guidance from God. The second adds to their blessings freedom, the true liberty which comes with submission and acceptance of His law.

Sickness, which yields the third type of suffering, is a commoner experience than the two preceding. The picture is lightly sketched, emphasis being laid on the cause of the sickness, which is sin, in accordance with the prevailing view in the Old Testament. The psalmist introduces the persons of whom he is to speak by the strongly condemnatory term "foolish ones," which refers not to intellectual feebleness, but to moral perversity. All sin is folly. Nothing is so insane as to do wrong. An ingenious correction has been suggested, and is accepted by Cheyne in the wake of Dyserinck, Graetz, and others, by which "sick men" is read for "foolish men." But it does not appear to the present writer to be so impossible as Cheyne thinks to "conceive the psalmist introducing a fresh tableau by

an ethical term such as fools." The whole verse (17) lays more stress on the sin than on the sickness, and the initial designation of the sufferers as "fools" is quite in harmony with its tone. They are habitual evil-doers, as is expressed by the weighty expression "the way (or course) of their transgression." Not by one or two breaches of moral law, but by inveterate, customary sins, men ruin their physical health. So the psalmist uses a form of the verb in ver. 17 *b* which expresses that the sinner drags down his punishment with his own hands. That is, of course, eminently true in such gross forms of sin as sow to the flesh, and of the flesh reap corruption. But it is no less really true of all transgression, since all brings sickness to the soul. Ver. 18 is apparently quoted from Job xxxiii. 20–22. It paints with impressive simplicity the failing appetite and consequent ebbing strength. The grim portals, of which Death keeps the keys, have all but received the sick men; but, before they pass into their shadow, they cry to Jehovah, and, like the other men in distress, they too are heard, feeble as their sick voice may be. The manner of their deliverance is strikingly portrayed. "He sent His word and healed them." As in Psalm cv. 19, God's word is almost personified. It is the channel of the Divine power. God's uttered will has power on material things. It is the same great thought as is expressed in "He spake and it was done." The psalmist did not know the Christian teaching that the personal Word of God is the agent of all the Divine energy in the realm of nature and of history, and that a far deeper sense than that which he attached to them would one day be found in his words, when the Incarnate Word was manifested, as Himself bearing and bearing away the sicknesses of humanity,

and rescuing not only the dying from going down to the grave, but bringing up the dead who had long lain there. God, who is Guide and Emancipator, is also Healer and Life-giver, and He is all these in the Word, which has become flesh, and dwelt and dwells among men.

Another travel-scene follows. The storm at sea is painted as a landsman would do it; but a landsman who had seen, from a safe shore, what he so vividly describes. He is impressed with the strange things that the bold men who venture to sea must meet, away out there beyond the point where sea and sky touch. With sure poetic instinct, he spends no time on trivial details, but dashes on his canvas the salient features of the tempest,—the sudden springing up of the gale; the swift response of the waves rolling high, with new force in their mass and a new voice in their breaking; the pitching craft, now on the crest, now in the trough; the terror of the helpless crew; the loss of steering power; the heavy rolling of the unmanageable, clumsy ship; and the desperation of the sailors, whose wisdom or skill was "swallowed up," or came to nothing.

Their cry to Jehovah was heard above the shriek of the storm, and the tempest fell as suddenly as it rose. The description of the deliverance is extended beyond the normal single verse, just as that of the peril had been prolonged. It comes like a benediction after the hurly-burly of the gale. How gently the words echo the softness of the light air into which it has died down, and the music which the wavelets make as they lap against the ship's sides! With what sympathy the poet thinks of the glad hearts on board, and of their reaching the safe harbour, for which they had longed when they thought they would never see it more!

Surely it is a permissible application of these lovely words to read into them the Christian hope of preservation amid life's tempests,—

> "Safe into the haven guide,
> O receive my soul at last."

God the guide, the emancipator, the healer, is also the stiller of the storm, and they who cry to Him from the unquiet sea will reach the stable shore. "And so it came to pass, they all came safe to land."

As already observed, the tone changes with ver. 33, from which point onwards the psalmist adduces instances of Providential working of a different kind from those in the four vivid pictures preceding, and drops the refrains. In vv. 33–38 he describes a double change wrought on a land. The barrenness which blasts fertile soil is painted in language largely borrowed from Isaiah. "Ver. 33 *a* recalls Isa. l. 2 *b*; ver. 33 *b* is like Isa. xxxv. 7 *a*" (Delitzsch). The opposite change of desert into fertile ground is pictured as in Isa. xli. 18. The references in ver. 36 to "the hungry" and to "an inhabited city" connect with the previous part of the psalm, and are against the supposition that the latter half is not originally part of it. The incidents described refer to no particular instance, but are as general as those of the former part. Many a land, which has been blasted by the vices of its inhabitants, has been transformed into a garden by new settlers. "Where the Turks' horse has trod, no grass will grow."

Ver. 39 introduces the reverse, which often befalls prosperous communities, especially in times when it is dangerous to seem rich for fear of rapacious rulers. "The pressure" referred to in ver. 39 is the oppression of such. If so, ver. 40, which is quoted from Job xii.

21, 24, though introduced abruptly, does not disturb the sequence of thought. It grandly paints the judgment of God on such robber-princes, who are hunted from their seats by popular execration, and have to hide themselves in the pathless waste, from which those who cry to God were delivered (vv. 41 *b* and 4 *a*). On the other hand, the oppressed are lifted, as by His strong arm, out of the depths and set on high, like a man perched safely on some crag above high-water mark. Prosperity returning is followed by large increase and happy, peaceful family life, the chief good of man on earth. The outcome of the various methods of God's unvarying purpose is that all which is good is glad, and all which is evil is struck dumb. The two clauses of ver. 42, which describe this double effect, are quoted from two passages in Job—*a* from xxii. 19, and *b* from v. 16.

The psalm began with hymning the enduring loving-kindness of Jehovah. It ends with a call to all who would be wise to give heed to the various dealings of God, as exemplified in the specimens chosen in it, that they may comprehend how in all these one purpose rules, and all are examples of the manifold loving-kindnesses of Jehovah. This closing note is an echo of the last words of Hosea's prophecy. It is the broad truth which all thoughtful observance of Providence brings home to a man, notwithstanding many mysteries and apparent contradictions. "All things work together for good to them that love God"; and the more they love Him, the more clearly will they see, and the more happily will they feel, that so it is. How can a man contemplate the painful riddle of the world, and keep his sanity, without that faith? He who has it for his faith will have it for his experience.

PSALM CVIII.

1 Steadfast is my heart, O God,
I will sing and harp, yea, my glory [shall sing].
Awake, harp and lute,
I will wake the dawn.
3 I will give Thee thanks among the peoples, Jehovah,
And I will harp to Thee among the nations.
4 For great above the heavens is Thy loving-kindness,
And to the clouds Thy troth.
5 Exalt Thyself above the heavens, O God,
And above all the earth Thy glory.

6 That Thy beloved ones may be delivered,
Save with Thy right hand and answer me.
7 God has spoken in His holiness,
I will divide Shechem and measure out the valley of Succoth.
8 Mine is Gilead, mine Manasseh,
And Ephraim is the strength of my head,
Judah my baton of command.
9 Moab is my wash-basin,
Upon Edom will I throw my shoe,
Over Philistia will I shout aloud.
10 Who will bring me into the fortified city?
Who has guided me into Edom?
11 Hast not Thou, O God, cast us off,
And goest not out, O God, with our hosts?
12 Give us help from trouble,
For vain is help of man.
13 In God we shall do prowess,
And He, He will tread down our oppressors.

TWO fragments of Davidic psalms are here tacked together with slight variations. Vv. 1–5 are from Psalm lvii. 7–11; and vv. 6–13 from Psalm lx. 5–12.

The return from Babylon would be an appropriate occasion for thus revivifying ancient words. We have seen in preceding psalms that Israel's past drew the thoughts of the singers of that period, and the conjecture may be hazarded that the recent deliverance suggested to some devout man, whose mind was steeped in the songs of former days, the closeness with which old strains suited new joys. If so, there is pathetic meaning in the summons to the "psaltery and harp," which had hung silent on the willows of Babylon so long, to wake their ancient minstrelsy once more, as well as exultant confidence that the God who had led David to victory still leads His people. The hopes of conquest in the second part, the consciousness that while much has been achieved by God's help, much still remains to be won before Israel can sit secure, the bar or two in the minor key in ver. 11, which heighten the exultation of the rest of the song, and the cry for help against adversaries too strong for Israel's unassisted might, are all appropriate to the early stages of the return.

The variations from the original psalms are of slight moment. In ver. 1 the reduplication of the clause "Steadfast is my heart" is omitted, and "my glory" is detached from ver. 2, where it stands in Psalm lvii., and is made a second subject, equivalent to "I." In ver. 3 *a Jehovah* is substituted for *Lord*, and the copula "and" prefixed to *b*. Ver. 4 is not improved by the change of "unto the heavens" to "above the heavens," for an anti-climax is produced by following "*above* the heavens" with "*unto* the clouds."

In the second part, the only change affecting the sense is in ver. 9, where the summons to Philistia to "shout aloud because of me," which is probably meant

in sarcasm, is transformed into the plain expression of triumph, "Over Philistia will I shout aloud." The other changes are "me" for "us" in ver. 6, the omission of "and" before "mine Manasseh" in ver. 8, the substitution of a more usual synonym for "fenced" in ver. 10, and the omission of the pronoun "Thou" in ver. 11.

PSALM CIX.

1 God of my praise, be not silent,
2 For a wicked man's mouth and a mouth of deceit have they
opened on me.
3 And with words of hate have they compassed me,
And have fought [against] me causelessly.
4 In return for my love, they have been my adversaries,
But I—I was [all] prayer.
5 And they have laid upon me evil in return for good,
And hate in return for my love.

6 Set in office over him a wicked man,
And may an adversary stand at his right hand!
7 When he is judged, let him go out guilty,
And let his prayer be [counted] for sin!
8 Be his days few,
His office may another take!
9 Be his children orphans,
And his wife a widow!
10 And may his children wander up and down and beg,
May they seek [bread] [far] from the ruins [of their house]!
11 May a creditor get into his nets all that he has,
And may strangers plunder [the fruit of] his toil!
12 May there be no one to continue loving-kindness to him,
And may there be no one that shows favour to his orphans!
13 May his posterity be cut off,
In the next generation may their name be blotted out!
14 Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before Jehovah,
And the sin of his mother not be blotted out!
15 May they be before Jehovah continually,
And may He cut off their memory from the earth!

16 Because he remembered not to show loving-kindness,
And persecuted the afflicted and poor man,
And the heart-stricken, to do him to death.

17 And he loved cursing—and it came on him,
And delighted not in blessing—and it remained far from him.
18 And he clothed himself [with] cursing like his garment,
And it came like water into his inwards,
And like oil into his bones.
19 May it be to him like a robe [with which] he covers himself,
And for a girdle [which] he continually girds on!
20 Be this the wage of my adversaries from Jehovah,
And of those who speak evil against my soul!

21 But Thou, Jehovah, Lord, deal with me for Thy name's sake,
Because Thy loving-kindness is good, deliver me,
22 Because afflicted and poor am I,
And my heart is pierced within me.
23 Like a shadow when it stretches out am I gone,
I am shaken out, like the locust.
24 My knees give out through fasting,
And my flesh falls away from fatness.
25 And I—I have become a reproach to them,
They see me, they nod their head.
26 Help me, Jehovah, my God,
Save me, according to Thy loving-kindness:
27 That they may know that this is Thy hand,
Thou—Thou, Jehovah, hast done it.
28 They—they curse, but Thou—Thou dost bless;
They arose, and were put to shame,
And Thy servant rejoices.
29 My adversaries clothe themselves [with] disgrace,
And cover themselves like a mantle with their shame.
30 I will praise Jehovah greatly with my mouth,
And amidst many will I praise Him.
31 For He stands at the right hand of the poor,
To save him from those that judge his soul.

THIS is the last and the most terrible of the imprecatory psalms. Its central portion (vv. 6–20) consists of a series of wishes, addressed to God, for the heaping of all miseries on the heads of one "adversary" and of all his kith and kin. These maledictions are enclosed in prayers, which make the most striking contrast to them; vv. 1–5 being the plaint of a loving soul, shrinkingly conscious of an atmosphere

of hatred, and appealing gently to God; while vv. 21–31 expatiate in the presentation to Him of the suppliant's feebleness and cries for deliverance, but barely touch on the wished-for requital of enemies. The combination of devout meekness and trust with the fiery imprecations in the core of the psalm is startling to Christian consciousness, and calls for an effort of "historical imagination" to deal with it fairly. The attempts to attenuate the difficulty, either by making out that the wishes are not wishes, but prophecies of the fate of evil-doers, or that vv. 6–20 are the psalmist's quotation of his enemies' wishes about him, or that the whole is Messianic prediction of the fate of Judas or of the enemies of the Christ, are too obviously makeshifts. It is far better to recognise the discordance between the temper of the psalmist and that enjoined by Christ than to try to cover it over. Our Lord Himself has signalised the difference between His teaching and that addressed to "them of old time" on the very point of forgiveness of enemies, and we are but following His guidance when we recognise that the psalmist's mood is distinctly inferior to that which has now become the law for devout men.

Divine retribution for evil was the truth of the Old Testament, as forgiveness is that of the New. The conflict between God's kingdom and its enemies was being keenly and perpetually waged, in most literal fashion. Devout men could not but long for the triumph of that with which all good was associated, and therefore for the defeat and destruction of its opposite. For no private injuries, or for these only in so far as the suffering singer is a member of the community which represents God's cause, does he ask the descent of God's vengeance, but for the insults and hurts

inflicted on righteousness. The form of these maledictions belongs to a lower stage of revelation; the substance of them, considered as passionate desires for the destruction of evil, burning zeal for the triumph of Truth, which is God's cause, and unquenchable faith that He is just, is a part of Christian perfection.

The usual variety of conjectures as to authorship exists. Delitzsch hesitatingly accepts the superscription as correct in assigning the psalm to David. Olshausen, as is his custom, says, "Maccabean"; Cheyne inclines to "the time of Nehemiah (in which case the enemy might be Sanballat), or even perhaps the close of the Persian age" ("Orig. of Psalt.," 65). He thinks that the "magnanimous David" could not have uttered "these laboured imprecations," and that the speaker is "not a brave and bold warrior, but a sensitive poet." Might he not be both?

To address God as the "God of my praise," even at such a moment of dejection, is a triumph of faith. The name recalls to the psalmist past mercies, and expresses his confidence that he will still have cause to extol his Deliverer, while it also pleads with God what He has done as a reason for doing the like in new circumstances of need. The suppliant speaks in praise and prayer; he asks God to speak in acts of rescuing power. A praying man cannot have a dumb God. And His mighty Voice, which hushes all others and sets His suppliants free from fears and foes, is all the more longed for and required, because of those cruel voices that yelp and snarl round the psalmist. The contrast between the three utterances—his, God's, and his enemies'—is most vivid. The foes have come at him with open mouths. "A wicked man's mouth" would read, by a slight alteration, "a mouth of wicked-

ness"; but the recurrence of the word "wicked man" in ver. 6 seems to look back to this verse, and to make the rendering above probable. Lies and hatred ring the psalmist round, but his conscience is clear. "They have hated me without a cause" is the experience of this ancient sufferer for righteousness' sake, as of the Prince of all such. This singer, who is charged with pouring out a flood of "unpurified passion," had, at any rate, striven to win over hatred by meekness; and if he is bitter, it is the pain and bitterness of love flung back with contumely, and only serving to exacerbate enmity. Nor had he met with evil the first returns of evil for good, but, as he says, "I was [all] prayer" (compare Psalm cxx. 7, "I am—peace"). Repelled, his whole being turned to God, and in calm communion with Him found defence and repose. But his patient meekness availed nothing, for his foes still "laid evil" on him in return for good. The prayer is a short record of a long martyrdom. Many a foiled attempt of patient love preceded the psalm. Not till the other way had been tried long enough to show that malignity was beyond the reach of conciliation did the psalmist appeal to the God of recompenses. Let that be remembered in judging the next part of the psalm.

The terrible maledictions (vv. 6–20) need little commentary. They may be left in all their awfulness, which is neither to be extenuated nor degraded into an outburst of fierce personal vindictiveness. It is something far more noble than that. These terrible verses are prophecy, but they are prayers too; and prayers which can only be accounted for by remembering the spirit of the old dispensation. They are the more intense, because they are launched against

an individual, probably the chief among the foes. In vv. 6–15 we have imprecations pure and simple, and it is noteworthy that so large a part of these verses refers to the family of the evil-doer. In vv. 16–20 the grounds of the wished-for destruction are laid in the sinner's perverted choice, and the automatic action of sin working its own punishment is vividly set forth.

Vv. 6–8 are best taken in close connection, as representing the trial and condemnation of the object of the psalmist's imprecations, before a tribunal. He prays that the man may be haled before a wicked judge. The word rendered "set" is the root from which that rendered "office" in ver. 8 comes, and here means to set in a position of authority—*i.e.*, in a judicial one. His judge is to be "a wicked man" like himself, for such have no mercy on each other. An accuser is to stand at his right hand. The word rendered *adversary* (the verb cognate with which is used in ver. 4) is "Satan"; but the general meaning of hostile accuser is to be preferred here. With such a judge and prosecutor the issue of the cause is certain—"May he go out [from the judgment-hall] guilty." A more terrible petition follows, which is best taken in its most terrible sense. The condemned man cries for mercy, not to his earthly judge, but to God, and the psalmist can ask that the last despairing cry to Heaven may be unanswered, and even counted sin. It could only be so, if the heart that framed it was still an evil heart, despairing, indeed, but obdurate. Then comes the end: the sentence is executed. The criminal dies, and his office falls to another; his wife is a widow, and his children fatherless. This view of the connection gives unity to what is otherwise a mere heap of unconnected maledictions. It also brings out more clearly that the

psalmist is seeking not merely the gratification of private animosity, but the vindication of public justice, even if ministered by an unjust judge. Peter's quotation of ver. 8 *b* in reference to Judas (Acts i. 20) does not involve the Messianic character of the psalm.

Vv. 10–15 extend the maledictions to the enemy's children and parents, in accordance with the ancient strong sense of family solidarity, which was often expressed in practice by visiting the kindred of a convicted criminal with ruin, and levelling his house with the ground. The psalmist wishes these consequences to fall in all their cruel severity, and pictures the children as vagabonds, driven from the desolation which had, in happier days, been their home, and seeking a scanty subsistence among strangers. The imprecations of ver. 11 at first sight seem to hark back to an earlier stage in the wicked man's career, contemplating him as still in life. But the wish that his wealth may be "ensnared" by creditors and stolen by strangers is quite appropriate as a consequence of his sentence and execution; and the prayer in ver. 12, that there may be no one to "draw out loving-kindness" to him, is probably best explained by the parallel clause. A dead man lives a quasi-life in his children, and what is done to them is a prolongation of what was done to him. Thus helpless, beggars, homeless, and plundered, "the seed of evil-doers" would naturally be short-lived, and the psalmist desires that they may be cut off, and the world freed from an evil race. His wishes go backwards too, and reach to the previous as well as the subsequent generation. The foe had come of a bad stock—parents, son, and son's sons are to be involved in a common doom, because partakers of a common sin. The special reason for the terrible

desire that the iniquity of his father and mother may never be blotted out seems to be, the desire that the accumulated consequences of hereditary sin may fall on the heads of the third generation—a dread wish, which experience shows is often tragically fulfilled, even when the sufferers are far less guilty than their ancestors. "Father, forgive them" is the strongest conceivable contrast to these awful prayers. But the psalmist's petition implies that the sins in question were unrepented sins, and is, in fact, a cry that, as such, they should be requited in the "cutting off the memory" of such a brood of evil-doers "from the earth."

In ver. 16 a new turn of thought begins, which is pursued till ver. 20—namely, that of the self-retributive action of a perverted choice of evil. "He remembered not" to be gracious to him who needed compassion; therefore it is just that he should not be remembered on earth, and that his sin should be remembered in heaven. He deliberately chose cursing rather than blessing as his attitude and act towards others; therefore cursing comes to him and blessing remains far from him, as others' attitude and act to him. The world is a mirror which, on the whole, gives back the smile or the frown which we present to it. Though the psalmist has complained that he had loved and been hated in return, he does not doubt that, in general, the curser is cursed back again and the blesser blessed. Outwardly and inwardly, the man is wrapped in and saturated with "cursing." Like a robe or a girdle, it encompasses him; like a draught of water, it passes into his inmost nature; like anointing oil oozing into the bones, it steals into every corner of his soul. His own doings come back to poison him. The kick of the

gun which he fires is sure to hurt his own shoulder, and it is better to be in front of the muzzle than behind the trigger. The last word of these maledictions is not only a wish, but a declaration of the Law of Divine Retribution. The psalmist could not have found it in his heart to pray such a prayer unless he had been sure that Jehovah paid men's wages punctually in full, and that conviction is the kernel of his awful words. He is equally sure that his cause is God's—because he is sure that God's cause is his, and that he suffers for righteousness and for the righteous Jehovah.

The final part (vv. 21–31) returns to lowly, sad petitions for deliverance, of the kind common to many psalms. Very pathetically, and as with a tightening of his grasp, does the singer call on his helper by the double name "Jehovah, Lord," and plead all the pleas with God which are hived in these names. The prayer in ver. 21 *b* resembles that in Psalm lxix. 16, another of the psalms of imprecation. The image of the long-drawn-out shadow recurs in Psalm cii. 11. The word rendered "am I gone" occurs here only, and implies compulsory departure. The same idea of external force hurrying one out of life is picturesquely presented in the parallel clause. "I am shaken out," as a thing which a man wishes to get rid of is shaken out of the folds of a garment. The psalmist thinks of himself as being whirled away, helpless, as a swarm of locusts blown into the sea. The physical feebleness in ver. 24 is probably to be taken literally, as descriptive of the havoc wrought on him by his persecutions and trouble of soul, but may be, as often, metaphor for that trouble itself.

The expression in ver. 24 *b* rendered above "*falls away* from fatness" is literally "has become a liar," or

brother, which is probably a picturesque way of saying that the psalmist's flesh had, as it were, become a reproach from its former well-nourished condition and was consumed by the worm. Others would keep the literal meaning of the word rendered "leaves"—*i.e.*, oil—and translate "My flesh has shrunk up for lack of oil" (so Baethgen and Kay).

One more glance at the enemies, now again regarded as many, and one more flash of confidence that his prayer is heard, close the psalm. Once again God is invoked by His name Jehovah, and the suppliant presses close to Him as "my God"; once again he casts himself on that loving-kindness, whose measure is wider than we thought and will ensure him larger answers than we desire; once again he builds all his hope on it, and pleads no claims of his own. He longs for personal deliverance; but not only for personal ends, but rather that it may be an undeniable manifestation of Jehovah's power. That is a high range of feeling which subordinates self to God even while longing for deliverance, and wishes more that He should be glorified than that self should be blessed. There is almost a smile on the psalmist's face as he contrasts his enemies' curse with God's blessing, and thinks how ineffectual are these and how omnipotent is that. He casts the issue of the strife between strong men and a blessing God to be as good as already decided. So he can look with new equanimity on the meagre proportions of his foes; for he sees in faith their confusion and defeat, and already feels some springs in the heart of the joy of victory and is sure of already clothing themselves with shame. It is the prerogative of faith to behold things that are not as though they were and to live as in the hour of triumph even while in the thick of the fight.

The psalm began with addressing "the God of my *praise*"; it ends with the confidence and the vow that the singer will yet *praise* Him. It painted an adversary standing at the right hand of the wicked to condemn him; it ends with the assurance that Jehovah stands at the right hand of His afflicted servant, as his advocate to protect him. The wicked man was to "go out guilty"; he whom God defends shall come forth from all that would judge his soul. "If God be for us, who can be against us? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?"

PSALM CX.

1 The oracle of Jehovah to my lord;
Sit Thou [enthroned] at My right hand,
Until I make Thine enemies the stool for Thy feet.
2 The sceptre of Thy might shall Jehovah stretch forth from Zion,
"Rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies."
3 Thy people are free-will offerings in the day of Thine army;
In holy attire,
From the womb of the dawn,
[Comes] to Thee the dew of Thy youth[s].
4 Jehovah has sworn and will not repent,
Thou art a priest for ever,
After the manner of Melchizedek.

5 The Lord at Thy right hand
Has crushed kings in the day of His wrath.
6 He shall judge among the nations,
He has filled [the land] with corpses,
He has crushed the head over a wide land.
7 Of the brook shall He drink on the way,
Therefore shall He lift up [His] head.

DOES our Lord's attribution of this psalm to David foreclose the question of its authorship for those who accept His authority? Many, who fully recognise and reverently bow to that authority, think that it does not, and appeal for support of their view to the unquestionable limitations of His earthly knowledge. It is urged that His object in His argument with the Pharisees, in which this psalm is quoted by Him (Matt. xxii. 41–46 and parallels), is not to instruct them on the authorship of the psalm, but to argue from its

contents; and though He assumes the Davidic authorship, accepted generally at the time, yet the cogency of His argument is unimpaired, so long as it is recognised that the psalm is a Messianic one, and that the august language used in it of the Messiah is not compatible with the position of One who was a mere human son of David (Driver, "Introd.," p. 363, note). So also Dr. Sanday ("Inspiration," p. 420) says that "the Pharisees were taken upon their own ground, and the fallacy of their conclusion was shown on their own premises." But our Lord's argument is not drawn from the "august language" of the psalm, but from David's relationship to the Messiah, and crumbles to pieces if he is not the singer. It may freely be admitted that there are instances in our Lord's references to the Old Testament in which He speaks from the point of view of His hearers in regard to it; but these are cases in which nothing turned on the question whether that point of view was correct or not. Here everything turns on it; and to maintain that, in so important a crisis, He based His arguments on an error comes perilously near to imputing fallibility to Him as our teacher. Most of recent writers who advocate the view in question would recoil from such a consequence; but their position is divided from it by a thin line. Whatever the limitations of our Lord's human knowledge, they did not affect His authority in regard to what He did teach; and the present writer ventures to believe that He did teach that *David* in this psalm calls Messiah his Lord.

If so, the psalm stands alone, as not having primary reference to an earthly king. It is not, like other Messianic psalms, typical, but directly prophetic of Messiah, and of Him only. We are not warranted

in denying the possibility of such direct prophecy; and the picture drawn in this psalm, so far transcending any possible original among the sons of men, has not full justice done to its majestic lines, unless it is recognised as setting forth none other than the personal Messiah. True, it is drawn with colours supplied from earthly experiences, and paints a warrior-monarch. The prophet-psalmist, no doubt, conceived of literal warfare; but a prophet did not always understand the oracles which he spoke.

The psalm falls into two parts: the Vision of the Priest-King and His army (vv. 1–4); the King's Warfare and Victory (vv. 5–7).

"The oracle of Jehovah" introduces a fresh utterance of God's, heard by the psalmist, who thus claims to be the mouthpiece of the Divine will. It is a familiar prophetic phrase, but usually found at the close—not, as here, at the beginning—of the utterance to which it refers (see, however, Isa. lvi. 8; Zech. xii. 1). The unusual position makes the Divine origin of the following words more emphatic. "My Lord" is a customary title of respect in addressing a superior, but not in speaking *of* him. Its use here evidently implies that the psalmist regards Messiah as his king, and the best comment on it is Matt. xxii. 43: "How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord?" The substance of the oracle follows. He who is exalted to sit at the right hand of a king is installed thereby as his associate in rule. He who is seated by God at His right hand is received into such mystery of participation in Divine authority and power, as cannot be imposed on frail humanity. The rigid monotheism of the Jewish singers makes this tremendous "oracle" the more remarkable. Greek gods might have their assessors from among

mortals, but who shall share Jehovah's throne? "Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king" (1 Chron. xxix. 23); but that is no parallel, nor does it show that the oracle of this psalm simply states the dignity of the theocratic king. Solomon's throne was Jehovah's, as being established by Him, and since he represented Jehovah on earth; but to sit at Jehovah's right hand means far more than this. That session of Messiah is represented as the prelude to the exercise of Divine power for His triumph over His foes; and that apparent repose, while Jehovah fights for him, is singularly contrasted with his activity as described in verses 6, 7. The singer speaks riddles about a union of undisturbed tranquillity and of warlike strenuousness, which are only solved when we see their fulfilment in Him who sitteth at the right hand of God, and who yet goes with His armies where they go. "He was received up, and sat on the right hand of God, . . . the Lord also working with them" (Mark xvi. 19, 20). The opened heavens showed to Stephen his Master, not sitting, but standing in the posture of readiness to help him dying, and to receive him made more alive by death. His foot shall be on the neck of His foes, as Joshua bade the men of Israel put theirs on the conquered kings'. Opposition shall not only be subdued, but shall become subsidiary to Messiah's dominion, "a stepping-stone to higher things."

The Divine oracle is silent, and the strain is taken up by the psalmist himself, who speaks "in the spirit," in the remainder of the psalm, no less than he did when uttering Jehovah's word. Messiah's dominion has a definite earthly centre. From Zion is this King to rule. His mighty sceptre, the symbol and instrument of His God-given power, is to stretch thence.

How far? No limit is named to the sweep of His sway. But since Jehovah is to extend it, it must be conterminous with the reach of His omnipotence. Ver. 2 *b* may be taken as the words of Jehovah, but more probably they are the loyal exclamation of the psalmist, moved to his heart's depths by the vision which makes the bliss of his solitude. The word rendered "rule" is found also in Balaam's prophecy of Messiah (Numb. xxiv. 19) and in the Messianic Psalm lxxii. 8. The kingdom is to subsist in the midst of enemies. The normal state of the Church on earth is militant. Yet the enemies are not only a ring of antagonists round a centre of submission, but into their midst His power penetrates, and Messiah dominates them too, for all their embattled hostility. A throne round which storms of rebellion rage is an insecure seat. But this throne is established through enmity, because it is upheld by Jehovah.

The kingdom in relation to its subjects is the theme of ver. 3, which accords with the warlike tone of the whole psalm, by describing them as an army. The period spoken of is "the day of Thy host," or array—the time when the forces are mustered and set in order for battle. The word rendered *free-will offerings* may possibly mean simply "willingnesses," and the abstract noun may be used as in "I am—prayer" (Psalm cix. 4)—*i.e.*, most willing; but it is better to retain the fuller and more picturesque meaning of glad, spontaneous sacrifices, which corresponds with the priestly character afterwards ascribed to the people, and goes very deep into the essence of Christian service. There are to be no pressed men or mercenaries in that host. As Deborah sang of her warriors, these "offer themselves willingly." Glad consecration of self, issuing in spontaneous enlist-

ing for the wars of the King, is to characterise all His subjects. The army is the nation. These soldiers are to be priests. They are clad in holy attire, "fine linen, clean and white." That representation goes as deep into the nature of the warfare they have to wage and the weapons they have to wield, as the former did into the impulse which sends them to serve under Messiah's flag. The priestly function is to bring God and man near to one another. Their warfare can only be for the carrying out of their office. Their weapons are sympathy, gentleness, purity. Like the Templars, the Christian soldier must bear the cross on his shield and the hilt of his sword. Another reading of this phrase is "on the holy mountains," which is preferred by many, among whom are Hupfeld and Cheyne. But the great preponderance of evidence is against the change, which obliterates a very striking and profound thought.

Ver. 3 *c*, *d* gives another picture of the host. The usual explanation of the clause takes "youth" as meaning, not the young vigour of the King, but, in a collective sense, the assembled warriors, whom it paints as in the bloom of early manhood. The principal point of comparison of the army with the dew is probably its multitude (2 Sam. xvii. 12). The warriors have the gift of un-aging youth, as all those have who renew their strength by serving Christ. And it is permissible to take other characteristics of the dew than its abundance, and to think of the mystery of its origin, of the tiny mirrors of the sunshine hanging on every cobweb, of its power to refresh, as well as of the myriads of its drops.

But this explanation, beautiful and deep as it is, is challenged by many. The word rendered "dawn"

is unusual. "Youth" is not found elsewhere in the sense thus assigned to it. "Dew" is thought to be an infelicitous emblem. "From a linguistic point of view" Cheyne pronounces both "dawn" and "dew" to be intolerable. Singularly enough, in the next sentence, he deprecates a previous opinion of his own as premature "until we know something certain of the Hebrew of the Davidic age" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 482). But if such certainty is lacking, why should these two words be "intolerable"? He approves Bickell's conjectural emendation, "From the womb, from the dawn [of life], Thy youthful band is devoted to Thee."

Ver. 4 again enshrines a Divine utterance, which is presented in an even more solemn manner than that of ver. 1. The oath of Jehovah by Himself represents the thing sworn as guaranteed by the Divine character. God, as it were, pledges His own name, with its fulness of unchanging power, to the fulfilment of the word; and this irrevocable and omnipotent decree is made still more impressive by the added assurance that He "will not repent." Thus inextricably intertwined with the augustness of God's nature, the union of the royal and priestly offices in the person of Messiah shall endure for ever. Some commentators contend that every theocratic king of Israel was a priest, inasmuch as he was king of a priestly nation. But since the national priestliness did not hinder the appointment of a special order of priests, it is most natural to assume that the special order is here referred to. Why should the singer have gone back into the mists of antiquity, in order to find the type of a priest-king, if the union of offices belonged, by virtue of his kinghood, to every Jewish monarch? Clearly the combination was unexampled; and such an incident as that of Uzziah's

leprosy shows how carefully the two great offices were kept apart. Their opposition has resulted in many tragedies: probably their union would be still more fatal, except in the case of One whose priestly sacrifice of Himself as a willing offering is the basis of His royal sway. The "order of Melchizedek" has received unexpected elucidation from the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, which bring to light, as a correspondent of the Pharaoh, one Ebed-tob, king of Uru-salim (the city of Salim, the god of peace). In one of his letters he says, "Behold, neither my father nor my mother have exalted me in this place; the prophecy [or perhaps, arm] of the mighty King has caused me to enter the house of my father." By the mighty King is meant the god whose sanctuary stood on the summit of Mount Moriah. He was king of Jerusalem, because he was priest of its god (Sayce, "Criticism and the Monuments," p. 175). The psalm lays stress on the eternal duration of the royalty and priesthood of Messiah; and although in other Messianic psalms the promised perpetuity may be taken to refer to the dynasty rather than the individual monarch, that explanation is impossible here, where a person is the theme.

Many attempts have been made to fit the language of the psalm to one or other of the kings of Israel; but, not to mention other difficulties, this ver. 4 remains as an insuperable obstacle. In default of Israelite kings, one or other of the Maccabean family has been thought of. Cheyne strongly pronounces for Simon Maccabæus, and refers, as others have done, to a popular decree in his favour, declaring him "ruler and high priest for ever" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 26). On this identification, Baethgen asks if it is probable that the singer should have taken his theme from a popular

decree, and have transformed it (*umgestempelt*) into a Divine oath. It may be added that Simon was not a king, and that he was by birth a priest.

The second part of the psalm carries the King into the battle-field. He comes forth from the throne, where He sat at Jehovah's right hand, and now Jehovah stands at His right hand. The word rendered *Lord* in ver. 5 is never used of any but God, and it is best to take it so here, even though to do so involves the necessity of supposing a change in the subject either in ver. 6 or ver. 7, which latter verse can only refer to the Messiah. The destructive conflict described is said to take place "in the day of His wrath"—*i.e.*, of Jehovah's. If this is strictly interpreted, the period intended is not that of "the day of Thine army," when by His priestly warriors the Priest-King wages a warfare among His enemies, which wins them to be His lovers, but that dread hour when He comes forth from His ascended glory to pronounce doom among the nations and to crush all opposition. Such a final apocalypse of the wrath of the Lamb is declared to us in clearer words, which may well be permitted to cast a light back on this psalm (Rev. xix. 11). "He has crushed kings" is the perfect of prophetic certainty or intuition, the scene being so vividly bodied before the singer that he regards it as accomplished. "He shall judge" or give doom "among the nations,"—the future of pure prediction. Ver. 6*b* is capable of various renderings. It may be rendered as above, or the verb may be intransitive and the whole clause translated, *It becomes full of corpses* (so Delitzsch); or the word may be taken as an adjective, in which case the meaning would be the same as if it were an intransitive verb. "The head over a wide land" is also

ambiguous. If "head" is taken as a collective noun, it means rulers. But it may be also regarded as referring to a person, the principal antagonist of the Messiah. This is the explanation of many of the older interpreters, who think of Death or "the prince of this world," but is too fanciful to be adopted.

Ver. 7 is usually taken as depicting the King as pausing in His victorious pursuit of the flying foe, to drink, like Gideon's men, from the brook, and then with renewed vigour pressing on. But is not the idea of the Messiah needing refreshment in that final conflict somewhat harsh?—and may there not be here a certain desertion of the order of sequence, so that we are carried back to the time prior to the enthronement of the King? One is tempted to suggest the possibility of this closing verse being a full parallel with Phil. ii. 7–9. Christ on the way to His throne drank of "waters of affliction," and precisely therefore is He "highly exalted."

The choice for every man is, being crushed beneath His foot, or being exalted to sit with Him on His throne. "He that overcometh, to him will I give to sit down with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne." It is better to sit on His throne than to be His footstool.

PSALM CXI.

Hallelujah.

1 א I will thank Jehovah with my whole heart,
ב In the council of the upright and in the congregation.
2 ג Great are the works of Jehovah,
ד Inquired into by all who delight in them.
3 ה Honour and majesty is His working,
ו And His righteousness stands fast for aye.
4 ז He has made a memorial for His wonders,
ח Gracious and compassionate is Jehovah.
5 ט Food has He given to those who fear Him,
י He remembers His covenant for ever.
6 כ The power of His works has He showed to His people,
ל In giving them the inheritance of the nations.
7 מ The works of His hands are truth and judgment
נ Trustworthy are all His commandments;
8 ס Established for aye and for ever,
ע Done in truth and uprightness.
9 פ Redemption has He sent to His people,
צ He has ordained His covenant for ever,
ק Holy and dread is His name.
10 ר The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom,
ש Good understanding [belongs] to all who do them
ת His praise stands fast for aye.

ANOTHER series of psalms headed with Hallelujah begins here, and includes the two following psalms. The prefix apparently indicates liturgical use. The present psalm is closely allied to the next. Both are acrostic, and correspond verse to verse, as will appear in the exposition. Together they represent God and the godly, this psalm magnifying the Divine

character and acts, the other painting the ideal godly man as, in some real fashion, an "imitator of God as a beloved child." Both are gnomic, and built up by accumulation of slightly connected particulars, rather than flowing continuously in a sequence which springs from one pregnant thought. Both have allusions to other psalms and to the Book of Proverbs, and share with many of the psalms of Book V. the character of being mainly working over of old materials.

The Psalmist begins by a vow to thank Jehovah with his whole heart, and immediately proceeds to carry it out. "The upright" is by some understood as a national designation, and "council" taken as equivalent to "congregation." But it is more in accordance with usage to regard the psalmist as referring first to a narrower circle of like-minded lovers of good, to whose congenial ears he rejoices to sing. There was an Israel within Israel, who would sympathise with his song. The "congregation" is then either the wider audience of the gathered people, or, as Delitzsch takes it, equivalent to "*their* congregation"—*i.e.*, of the upright.

The theme of thanksgiving is, as ever, God's works for Israel; and the first characteristic of these which the psalmist sings is their greatness. He will come closer presently, and discern more delicate features, but now, the magnitude of these colossal manifestations chiefly animates his song. Far-stretching in their mass and in their consequences, deep-rooted in God's own character, His great deeds draw the eager search of "those who delight in them." These are the same sympathetic auditors to whom the song is primarily addressed. There were indolent beholders in Israel, before whom the works of God were passed without

exciting the faintest desire to know more of their depth. Such careless onlookers, who see and see not, are rife in all ages. God shines out in His deeds, and they will not give one glance of sharpened interest. But the test of caring for His doings is the effort to comprehend their greatness, and plunge oneself into their depths. The more one gazes, the more one sees. What was at first but dimly apprehended as great resolves itself, as we look; and, first, "Honour and majesty," the splendour of His reflected character, shine out from His deeds, and then, when still more deeply they are pondered, the central fact of their righteousness, their conformity to the highest standard of rectitude, becomes patent. Greatness and majesty, divorced from righteousness, would be no theme for praise. Such greatness is littleness, such splendour is phosphorescent corruption.

These general contemplations are followed in vv. 4–6 by references to Israel's history as the greatest example of God's working. "He has made a memorial for His wonders." Some find here a reference to the Passover and other feasts commemorative of the deliverance from Egypt. But it is better to think of Israel itself as the "memorial," or of the deeds themselves, in their remembrance by men, as being, as it were, a monument of His power. The men whom God has blessed are standing evidences of His wonders. "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord." And the great attribute, which is commemorated by that "memorial," is Jehovah's gracious compassion. The psalmist presses steadily towards the centre of the Divine nature. God's works become eloquent of more and more precious truth as he listens to their voice. They spoke of greatness, honour, majesty, righteousness, but

tenderer qualities are revealed to the loving and patient gazer. The two standing proofs of Divine kindness are the miraculous provision of food in the desert and the possession of the promised land. But to the psalmist these are not past deeds to be remembered only, but continually repeated operations. "He remembers His covenant for ever," and so the experiences of the fathers are lived over again by the children, and to-day is as full of God as yesterday was. Still He feeds *us*, still He gives us *our* heritage.

From ver. 7 onwards a new thought comes in. God has spoken as well as wrought. His very works carry messages of "truth and judgment," and they are interpreted further by articulate precepts, which are at once a revelation of what He is and a law for what we should be. His law stands as fast as His righteousness (vv. 3, 8). A man may utterly trust His commandments. They abide eternally, for Duty is ever Duty, and His Law, while it has a surface of temporary ceremonial, has a core of immutable requirement. His commandments are *done—i.e.*, appointed by Him—"in truth and uprightness." They are tokens of His grace and revelations of His character.

The two closing verses have three clauses each, partly from the exigencies of the acrostic structure, and partly to secure a more impressive ending. Ver. 9 sums up all God's works in the two chief manifestations of His goodness which should ever live in Israel's thanks, His sending redemption and His establishing His everlasting covenant—the two facts which are as fresh to-day, under new and better forms, as when long ago this unknown psalmist sang. And he gathers up the total impression which God's dealings should leave, in the great saying, "Holy and dread is His name." In ver. 10 he some-

what passes the limits of his theme, and trenches on the territory of the next psalm, which is already beginning to shape itself in his mind. The designation of the fear of the Jehovah as "the beginning of wisdom" is from Prov. i. 7, ix. 10. "Beginning" may rather mean "principal part" (Prov. iv. 7, "principal thing"). The "them" of ver. 10 *b* is best referred, though the expression is awkward, to "commandments" in ver. 7. Less probably it is taken to allude to the "fear" and "wisdom" of the previous clause. The two clauses of this verse descriptive of the godly correspond in structure to *a* and *b* of ver. 9, and the last clause corresponds to the last of that verse, expressing the continual praise which should rise to that holy and dread Name. Note that the perpetual duration, which has been predicated of God's attributes, precepts, and covenant (vv. 3, 5, 8, 9), is here ascribed to His praise. Man's songs cannot fall dumb, so long as God pours out Himself in such deeds. As long as that Sun streams across the desert, stony lips will part in music to hail its beams.

PSALM CXII.

Hallelujah.

1 א Happy the man who fears Jehovah,
ב [Who] delights exceedingly in His commandments.
2 ג Mighty on the earth shall his seed be,
ד The generation of the upright shall be blessed.
3 ה Wealth and riches are in his house,
ו And his righteousness stands fast for aye.
4 ז There riseth in the darkness light to the upright,—
ח Gracious and pitiful and righteous is he.
5 ט Well is the man who pities and lends,
י He shall maintain his causes in [the] judgment.
6 כ For he shall not be moved for ever,
ל In everlasting remembrance shall the righteous be held.
7 מ Of evil tidings he shall not be afraid,
נ Steadfast is his heart, trusting in Jehovah.
8 ס Established is his heart, he shall not fear,
ע Until he looks on his adversaries.
9 פ He has scattered abroad, he has given to the poor,
צ His righteousness stands fast for aye,
ק His horn shall be exalted with glory.
10 ר The wicked man shall see it and be grieved,
ש He shall gnash his teeth and melt away,
ת The desire of wicked men shall perish.

"BE ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect," might be inscribed on this picture of a godly man, which, in structure and substance, reflects the contemplation of God's character and works contained in the preceding psalm. The idea that the godly man is, in some real sense, an image of God runs through the whole, and comes out strongly, at several points, in

the repetition of the same expressions in reference to both. The portrait of the ideal good man, outlined in this psalm, may be compared with those in Psalms xv. and xxiv. Its most characteristic feature is the prominence given to beneficence, which is regarded as eminently a reflection of God's. The foundation of righteousness is laid in ver. 1, in devout awe and inward delight in the commandments. But the bulk of the psalm describes the blessed consequences, rather than the essential characteristics, of godliness.

The basis of righteousness and beneficence to men must be laid in reverence and conformity of will towards God. Therefore the psalm begins with proclaiming that, apart from all external consequences, these dispositions carry blessedness in themselves. The close of the preceding psalm had somewhat overpassed its limits, when it declared that "the fear of Jehovah" was the beginning of wisdom and that to do His commandments was sound discretion.

This psalm echoes these sayings, and so links itself to the former one. It deepens them by pointing out that the fear of Jehovah is a fountain of joy as well as of wisdom, and that inward delight in the Law must precede outward doing of it. The familiar blessing attached in the Old Testament to godliness, namely, prosperous posterity, is the first of the consequences of righteousness which the psalm holds out. That promise belongs to another order of things from that of the New Testament; but the essence of it is true still, namely, that the only secure foundation for permanent prosperity is in the fear of Jehovah. "The generation of the upright" (ver. 2) does not merely mean the natural descendants of a good man—"It is a moral rather than a genealogical term" (Hupfeld)—as is

usually the case with the word "generation." Another result of righteousness is declared to be "wealth and riches" (ver. 3), which, again, must be taken as applying more fully to the Old Testament system of Providence than to that of the New.

A parallelism of the most striking character between God and the godly emerges in ver. 3 *b*, where the same words are applied to the latter as were used of the former, in the corresponding verse of Psalm cxi. It would be giving too great evangelical definiteness to the psalmist's words, to read into them the Christian teaching that man's righteousness is God's gift through Christ, but it unwarrantably eviscerates them of their meaning, if we go to the other extreme, and, with Hupfeld, suppose that the psalmist put in the clause under stress of the exigencies of the acrostic structure, and regard it as a "makeshift" and "stop-gap." The psalmist has a very definite and noble thought. Man's righteousness is the reflection of God's; and has in it some kindred with its original, which guarantees stability not all unlike the eternity of that source. Since ver. 3 *b* thus brings into prominence the ruling thought of the two psalms, possibly we may venture to see a fainter utterance of that thought, in the first clause of the verse, in which the "wealth and riches" in the righteous man's house may correspond to the "honour and majesty" attendant on God's works (cxi. 3 *a*).

Ver. 4 blends consequences of righteousness and characterisation of it, in a remarkable way. The construction is doubtful. In *a*, "upright" is in the plural, and the adjectives in *b* are in the singular number. They are appended abruptly to the preceding clause; and the loose structure has occasioned difficulty

to expositors, which has been increased by the scruples of some, who have not given due weight to the leading thought of correspondence between the human and Divine, and have hesitated to regard ver. 4*b* as referring to the righteous man, seeing that in Psalm cxi. 4*b* it refers to God. Hence efforts have been made to find other renderings. Delitzsch would refer the clause to God, whom he takes to be meant by "light" in the previous clause, while Hitzig, followed by Baethgen, would translate, "As a light, he (the righteous) rises in darkness for the upright," and would then consider "gracious," etc., as in apposition with "light," and descriptive of the righteous man's character as such. But the very fact that the words are applied to God in the corresponding verse of the previous psalm suggests their application here to the godly man, and the sudden change of number is not so harsh as to require the ordinary translation to be abandoned. However dark may be a good man's road, the very midnight blackness is a prophecy of sunrise; or, to use another figure,

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

(Compare Psalm xcvii. 11.) The fountain of pity in human hearts must be fed from the great source of compassion in God's, if it is to gush out unremittingly and bless the deserts of sorrow and misery. He who has received "grace" will surely exercise grace. "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke vi. 36).

Ver. 5 blends characteristics and consequences of goodness in reverse order from that in ver. 4. The compassionate man of ver. 4*b* does not let pity evaporate, but is moved by it to act and to lend (primarily

money, but secondarily) any needful help or solace. Benevolence which is not translated into beneficence is a poor affair. There is no blessing in it or for it; but it is well with the man who turns emotions into deeds. Lazy compassion hurts him who indulges in it, but that which "lends" gets joy in the act of bestowing aid. The result of such active compassion is stated in ver. 5 *b* as being that such a one will "maintain his causes in judgment," by which seems to be meant the judgment of earthly tribunals. If compassion and charity guide a life, it will have few disputes, and will contain nothing for which a judge can condemn. He who obeys the higher law will not break the lower.

Vv. 6–8 dwell mainly on one consequence of righteousness, namely, the stability which it imparts. While such a man lives, he shall be unmoved by shocks, and after he dies, his memory will live, like a summer evening's glow which lingers in the west till a new morning dawns. In ver. 7 the resemblance of the godly to God comes very beautifully to the surface. Psalm cxi. 7 deals with God's commandments as "trustworthy." The human parallel is an *established* heart. He who has learned to lean upon Jehovah (for such is the literal force of "trusting" here), and has proved the commandments utterly reliable as basis for his life, will have his heart steadfast. The same idea is repeated in ver. 8 with direct quotation of the corresponding verse of Psalm cxi. In both the word for "established" is the same. The heart that delights in God's established commandments is established by them, and, sooner or later, will look in calm security on the fading away of all evil things and men, while it rests indeed, because it rests in God. He who builds his transient life on and into the Rock of Ages

wins rocklike steadfastness, and some share in the perpetuity of his Refuge. Lives rooted in God are never uprooted.

The two final verses are elongated, like the corresponding ones in Psalm cxi. Again, beneficence is put in the forefront, as a kind of shorthand summing up of all virtues. And, again, in ver. 9 the analogy is drawn out between God and the godly. "He has sent redemption to His people"; and they, in their degree, are to be communicative of the gifts of which they have been made recipient. Little can they give, compared with what they have received; but what they have they hold in trust for those who need it, and the sure test of having obtained "redemption" is a "heart open as day to melting charity." In the former psalm, ver. 9 *b* declared that God has "ordained His covenant for ever"; and here the corresponding clause re-affirms that the good man's righteousness endures for ever. The final clauses of both verses also correspond, in so far as, in the former psalm, God's Name is represented as "holy and dread"—*i.e.*, the total impression made by His deeds exalts Him —and in the latter, the righteous man's "horn" is represented as "exalted in glory" or honour—*i.e.*, the total impression made by his deeds exalts *him*. Paul quotes the two former clauses of ver. 9 in 2 Cor. ix. 9 as involving the truth that Christian giving does not impoverish. The exercise of a disposition strengthens it; and God takes care that the means of beneficence shall not be wanting to him who has the spirit of it. The later Jewish use of "righteousness" as a synonym for *almsgiving* has probably been influenced by this psalm, in which beneficence is the principal trait in the righteous man's character, but there is no reason

for supposing that the psalmist uses the word in that restricted sense.

Ver. 10 is not parallel with the last verse of Psalm cxi., which stands, as we have seen, somewhat beyond the scope of the rest of that psalm. It gives one brief glimpse of the fate of the evil-doer, in opposition to the loving picture of the blessedness of the righteous. Thus it too is rather beyond the immediate object of the psalm of which it forms part. The wicked *sees*, in contrast with the righteous man's *seeing* in ver. 8. The one looks with peace on the short duration of antagonistic power, and rejoices that there is a God of recompenses; the other grinds his teeth in envious rage, as he beholds the perpetuity of the righteous. He "shall melt away," *i.e.*, in jealousy or despair. Opposition to goodness, since it is enmity towards God, is self-condemned to impotence and final failure. Desires turned for satisfaction elsewhere than to God are sure to perish. The sharp contrast between the righteousness of the good man, which endures for ever, in his steadfast because trustful heart, and the crumbling schemes and disappointed hopes which gnaw the life of the man whose aims go athwart God's will, solemnly proclaims an eternal truth. This psalm, like Psalm i., touches the two poles of possible human experience, in its first and last words, beginning with "happy the man" and ending with "shall perish."

PSALM CXIII.

Hallelujah.

1 Praise, ye servants of Jehovah,
Praise the name of Jehovah.
2 Be the name of Jehovah blessed
From henceforth and for evermore!
3 From the rising of the sun to its going down,
Praised be the name of Jehovah.

4 High above all nations is Jehovah,
Above the heavens His glory.
5 Who is like Jehovah our God?
Who sits enthroned on high,
6 Who looks far below
On the heavens and on the earth;

7 Who raises the helpless from the dust,
From the rubbish-heap He lifts the needy,
8 To seat him with nobles,
With the nobles of His people;
9 Who seats the barren [woman] in a house,
—A glad mother of her children.

THIS pure burst of praise is the first of the psalms composing the Hallel, which was sung at the three great feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles), as well as at the festival of Dedication and at the new moons. "In the domestic celebration of the Passover night 'the Hallel' is divided into two parts; the one half, Psalms cxiii., cxiv., being sung before the repast, before the emptying of the second festal cup, and the other half, Psalms cxv.-cxviii., after

the repast, after the filling of the fourth cup, to which the 'having sung an hymn' in Matt. xxvi. 30, Mark xiv. 26, . . . may refer" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*).

Three strophes of three verses each may be recognised, of which the first summons Israel to praise Jehovah, and reaches out through all time and over all space, in longing that God's name may be known and praised. The second strophe (vv. 4–6) magnifies God's exalted greatness; while the third (vv. 7–9) adores His condescension, manifested in His stooping to lift the lowly. The second and third of these strophes, however, overlap in the song, as the facts which they celebrate do. God's loftiness can never be adequately measured, unless His condescension is taken into account; and His condescension never sufficiently wondered at, unless His loftiness is felt.

The call to praise is addressed to Israel, whose designation "servants of Jehovah" recalls Isaiah II.'s characteristic use of that name in the singular number for the nation. With strong emphasis, the *name* of Jehovah is declared as the theme of praise. God's revelation of His character by deed and word must precede man's thanksgiving. They, to whom that Name has been entrusted, by their reception of His mercies are bound to ring it out to all the world. And in the Name itself, there lies enshrined the certainty that through all ages it shall be blessed, and in every spot lit by the sun shall shine as a brighter light, and be hailed with praises. The psalmist has learned the world-wide significance of Israel's position as the depository of the Name, and the fair vision of a universal adoration of it fills his heart. Ver. 3 *b* may be rendered "worthy to be praised is the name," but the context seems to suggest the rendering above.

The infinite exaltation of Jehovah above all dwellers on this low earth and above the very heavens does not lift Him too high for man's praise, for it is wedded to condescension as infinite. Incomparable is He; but still adoration can reach Him, and men do not clasp mist, but solid substance, when they grasp His Name. That incomparable uniqueness of Jehovah is celebrated in ver. 5 *a* in strains borrowed from Exod. xv. 11, while the striking description of loftiness combined with condescension in vv. 5 *b* and 6 resembles Isa. lvii. 15. The literal rendering of vv. 5 *b* and 6 *a* is, "Who makes high to sit, Who makes low to behold," which is best understood as above. It may be questioned whether "On the heavens and on the earth" designates the objects on which His gaze is said to be turned; or whether, as some understand the construction, it is to be taken with "Who is like Jehovah our God?" the intervening clauses being parenthetical; or whether, as others prefer, "in heaven" points back to "enthroned on high," and "on earth" to "looks far below." But the construction which regards the totality of created things, represented by the familiar phrase "the heavens and the earth," as being the objects on which Jehovah looks down from His inconceivable loftiness, accords best with the context and yields an altogether worthy meaning. Transcendent elevation, condescension, and omniscience are blended in the poet's thought. So high is Jehovah that the highest heavens are far beneath Him, and, unless His gaze were all-discerning, would be but a dim speck. That He should enter into relations with creatures, and that there should be creatures for Him to enter into relations with, are due to His stooping graciousness. These far-darting looks are looks of tenderness, and signify care as well as

knowledge. Since all things lie in His sight, all receive from His hand.

The third strophe pursues the thought of the Divine condescension as especially shown in stooping to the dejected and helpless and lifting them. The effect of the descent of One so high must be to raise the lowliness to which He bends. The words in vv. 7, 8, are quoted from Hannah's song (1 Sam. ii. 8). Probably the singer has in his mind Israel's restoration from exile, that great act in which Jehovah had shown His condescending loftiness, and had lifted His helpless people as from the ash-heap, where they lay as outcasts. The same event seems to be referred to in ver. 9, under a metaphor suggested by the story of Hannah, whose words have just been quoted. The "barren" is Israel (comp. Isa. liv. 1). The expression in the original is somewhat obscure. It stands literally "the barren of the house," and is susceptible of different explanations; but probably the simplest is to regard it as a contracted expression for the unfruitful wife in a house, "a housewife, but yet not a mother. Such an one has in her husband's house no sure position. . . . If God bestows children upon her, He by that very fact makes her for the first time thoroughly at home and rooted in her husband's house" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*). The joy of motherhood is tenderly touched in the closing line, in which the definite article is irregularly prefixed to "sons," as if the poet "points with his finger to the children with whom God blesses her" (Delitzsch, *u.s.*). Thus Israel, with her restored children about her, is secure in her home. That restoration was the signal instance of Jehovah's condescension and delight in raising the lowly. It was therefore the great occasion for world-wide and age-long praise.

The singer did not know how far it would be transcended by a more wonderful, more heart-touching manifestation of stooping love, when "The Word became flesh." How much more exultant and world-filling should be the praises from the lips of those who do know how low that Word has stooped, how high He has risen, and how surely all who hold His hand will be lifted from any ash-heap and set on His throne, sharers in the royalty of Him who has been partaker of their weakness!

PSALM CXIV.

1 When Israel went forth from Egypt,
The house of Jacob from a stammering people,
2 Judah became His sanctuary,
Israel His dominion.

3 The sea beheld and fled,
Jordan turned back.
4 The mountains leaped like rams,
The hills like the sons of a flock.

5 What ails thee, Sea, that thou fleest?
Jordan, that thou art turned back?
6 Mountains, that ye leap like rams?
Hills, like the sons of a flock?

7 At the presence of the Lord, writhe in pangs, O earth,
At the presence of the God of Jacob,
8 Who turns the rock into a pool of water,
The flint into a fountain of waters.

IT is possible that in this psalm Israel, restored from Babylon, is looking back to the earlier Exodus, and thrilling with the great thought that that old past lives again in the present. Such a historical parallel would minister courage and hope. But the eyes of psalmists were ever turning to the great days when a nation was born, and there are no data in this psalm which connect it with a special period, except certain peculiarities in the form of the words "turns" and "fountain" in ver. 8, both of which have a vowel appended (*i* in the former, *o* in the latter word), which is probably an archaism, used by a late poet for

ornament's sake. The same peculiarity is found in Psalm cxiii. 5–9, where it occurs five times.

A familiar theme is treated here with singular force and lyric fervour. The singer does not heap details together, but grasps one great thought. To him there are but two outstanding characteristics of the Exodus one, its place and purpose as the beginning of Israel's prerogative, and another, its apocalypse of the Majesty of Jehovah, the Ruler of Nature in its mightiest forms. These he hymns, and then leaves them to make their own impression. He has no word of "moral," no application, counsel, warning, or encouragement to give. Whoso will can draw these. Enough for him to lift his soaring song, and to check it into silence in the midst of its full music. He would be a consummate artist, if he were not something much better. The limpid clearness, the eloquent brevity of the psalm are not more obvious than its masterly structure. Its four pairs of verses, each laden with one thought, the dramatic vividness of the sudden questions in the third pair, the skilful suppression of the Divine name till the close, where it is pealed out in full tones of triumph, make this little psalm a gem.

In vv. 1, 2, the slighting glance at the land left by the ransomed people is striking. The Egyptians are to this singer "a stammering people," talking a language which sounded to him barely articulate. The word carries a similar contempt to that in the Greek "barbarian," which imitates the unmeaning babble of a foreign tongue. To such insignificance in the psalmist's mind had the once dreaded oppressors sunk! The great fact about the Exodus was that it was the birthday of the Nation, the beginning of its entrance on its high prerogatives. If the consecration of Judah as

"His sanctuary" took place when Israel went forth from Egypt, there can be no reference to the later erection of the material sanctuary in Jerusalem, and the names of Judah and Israel must both apply to the people, not to the land, which it would be an anachronism to introduce here. That deliverance from Egypt was in order to God's dwelling in Israel, and thereby sanctifying or setting it apart to Himself, "a kingdom of priests and an holy nation." Dwelling in the midst of them, He wrought wonders for them, as the psalm goes on to hymn; but this is the grand foundation fact, that Israel was brought out of bondage to be God's temple and kingdom. The higher deliverance of which that Exodus is a foreshadowing is, in like manner, intended to effect a still more wonderful and intimate indwelling of God in His Church. Redeemed humanity is meant to be God's temple and realm.

The historical substratum for vv. 3, 4, is the twin miracles of drying up the Red Sea and the Jordan, which began and closed the Exodus, and the "quaking" of Sinai at the Theophany accompanying the giving of the Law. These physical facts are imaginatively conceived as the effects of panic produced by some dread vision; and the psalmist heightens his representation by leaving unnamed the sight which dried the sea, and shook the steadfast granite cliffs. In the third pair of verses he changes his point of view from that of narrator to that of a wondering spectator, and asks what terrible thing, unseen by him, strikes such awe? All is silent now, and the wonders long since past. The sea rolls its waters again over the place where Pharaoh's host lie. Jordan rushes down its steep valley as of old, the savage peaks of Sinai know no tremors;—but these momentary wonders proclaimed an eternal truth.

So the psalmist answers his own question, and goes beyond it in summoning the whole earth to tremble, as sea, river, and mountain had done, for the same Vision before which they had shrunk is present to all Nature. Now the psalmist can peal forth the Name of Him, the sight of whom wrought these wonders. It is "the Lord," the Sovereign Ruler, whose omnipotence and plastic power over all creatures were shown when His touch made rock and flint forget their solidity and become fluid, even as His will made the waves solid as a wall, and His presence shook Sinai. He is still Lord of Nature. And, more blessed still, the Lord of Nature is the God of Jacob. Both these names were magnified in the two miracles (which, like those named in ver. 3, are a pair) of giving drink to the thirsty pilgrims. With that thought of omnipotence blended with gracious care, the singer ceases. He has said enough to breed faith and hearten courage, and he drops his harp without a formal close. The effect is all the greater, though some critics prosaically insist that the text is defective and put a row or two of asterisks at the end of ver. 8, "since it is not discernible what purpose the representation [*i.e.*, the whole psalm] is to serve" (Graetz)!

PSALM CXV.

1 Not to us, not to us, Jehovah,
But to Thy name give glory,
For the sake of Thy lovingkindness, for the sake of Thy troth.
2 Why should the nations say,
"Where, then, is their God?"

3 But our God is in the heavens,
Whatsoever He willed, He has done.
4 Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of the hands of men.
5 A mouth is theirs—and they cannot speak,
Eyes are theirs—and they cannot see,
6 Ears are theirs—and they cannot hear,
A nose is theirs—and they cannot smell.
7 Their hands—[with them] they cannot handle
Their feet—[with them] they cannot walk,
Not a sound can they utter with their throat.
8 Like them shall those who make them be,
[Even] every one that trusts in them.

9 Israel, trust thou in Jehovah,
Their help and shield is He.
10 House of Aaron, trust in Jehovah,
Their help and shield is He.
11 Ye who fear Jehovah, trust in Jehovah,
Their help and shield is He.

12 Jehovah has remembered us—He will bless,
He will bless the house of Israel,
He will bless the house of Aaron,
13 He will bless those who fear Jehovah,
The small as well as the great.

14 Jehovah will add to you,
To you and to your children.
15 Blessed be ye of Jehovah,
Who made heaven and earth!

16 The heavens are Jehovah's heavens,
But the earth He has given to the children of men.
17 It is not the dead who praise Jehovah,
Neither all they who descend into silence.
18 But we—we will bless Jehovah,
From henceforth and for evermore.

Hallelujah.

ISRAEL is in straits from heathen enemies, and cries to Jehovah to vindicate His own Name by delivering it. Strengthened by faith, which has been stung into action by taunts aimed at both the nation and its Protector, the psalmist triumphantly contrasts Jehovah in the heavens, moving all things according to His will, with idols which had the semblance of powers the reality of which was not theirs. Sarcastic contempt, indignation, and profound insight into the effect of idolatry in assimilating the worshipper to his god, unite in the picture (vv. 3–8). The tone swiftly changes into a summons to withdraw trust from such vanities, and set it on Jehovah, who can and will bless His servants (vv. 9–15); and the psalm closes with recognition of Jehovah's exaltation and beneficence, and with the vow to return blessing to Him for the blessings, already apprehended by faith, which He bestows on Israel.

Obviously the psalm is intended for temple worship, and was meant to be sung by various voices. The distribution of its parts may be doubtful. Ewald would regard vv. 1–11 as the voice of the congregation while the sacrifice was being offered; vv. 12–15 as that of the priest announcing its acceptance; and vv. 16–18

as again the song of the congregation. But there is plainly a change of singer at ver. 9; and the threefold summons to trust in Jehovah in the first clauses of vv. 9, 10, 11, may with some probability be allotted to a ministering official, while the refrain, in the second clause of each of these verses, may be regarded as pealed out with choral force. The solo voice next pronounces the benediction on the same three classes to whom it had addressed the call to trust. And the congregation, thus receiving Jehovah's blessing, sends back its praise, as sunshine from a mirror, in vv. 16–18.

The circumstances presupposed in the psalm suit many periods of Israel's history. But probably this, like the neighbouring psalms, is a product of the early days after the return from Babylon, when the feeble settlers were ringed round by scoffing foes, and had brought back from exile a more intimate knowledge and contemptuous aversion for idols and idolatry than had before been felt in Israel. Cheyne takes the psalm to be Maccabean, but acknowledges that there is nothing in it to fix that date, which he seeks to establish for the whole group mainly because he is sure of it for one member of the group, namely, Psalm cxviii. (*Orig. of Psalt.*, 18 *sq.*).

The prayer in vv. 1, 2, beautifully blends profound consciousness of demerit and confidence that, unworthy as Israel is, its welfare is inextricably interwoven with Jehovah's honour. It goes very deep into the logic of supplication, even though the thing desired is but deliverance from human foes. Men win their pleas with God, when they sue *in formâ pauperis*. There must be thorough abnegation of all claims based on self, before there can be faithful urging of the one prevalent motive, God's care for His own fair fame.

The under side of faith is self-distrust, the upper side is affiance on Jehovah. God has given pledges for His future by His past acts of self-revelation, and cannot but be true to His Name. His lovingkindness is no transient mood, but rests on the solid basis of His faithfulness, like flowers rooted in the clefts of a rock. The taunts that had tortured another psalmist long before (Psalm xlii. 3) have been flung now from heathen lips, with still more bitterness, and call for Jehovah's thunderous answer. If Israel goes down before its foes, the heathen will have warrant to scoff.

But, from their bitter tongues and his own fears, the singer turns, in the name of the sorely harassed congregation, to ring out the proclamation which answers the heathen taunt, before God answers it by deeds. "Our God is in heaven"—that is where He is; and He is not too far away to make His hand felt on earth. He is no impotent image; He does what He wills, executing to the last tittle His purposes; and conversely, He wills what He does, being constrained by no outward force, but drawing the determinations of His actions from the depths of His being. Therefore, whatever evil has befallen Israel is not a sign that it has lost Him, but a proof that He is near. The brief, pregnant assertion of God's omnipotence and sovereign freedom, which should tame the heathens' arrogance and teach the meaning of Israel's disasters, is set in eloquent opposition to the fiery indignation which dashes off the sarcastic picture of an idol. The tone of the description is like that of the manufacture of an image in Isa. xliv. 9–20. Psalm cxxxv. 15–18 repeats it verbatim. The vehemence of scorn in these verses suggests a previous, compelled familiarity with idolatry such as the exiles had. It corresponds with the

revolution which that familiarity produced, by extirpating for ever the former hankering after the gods of the nations. No doubt, there are higher weapons than sarcasm; and, no doubt, a Babylonian wise man could have drawn distinctions between the deity and its image, but such cobwebs are too fine-spun for rough fingers to handle, and the idolatry both of pagans and of Christians identifies the two.

But a deeper note is struck in ver. 8, in the assertion that, as is the god, so becomes the worshipper. The psalmist probably means chiefly, if not exclusively, in respect to the impotence just spoken of. So the worshipper and his idol are called by the same name (Isa. xliv. 9, *vanity*), and, in the tragic summary of Israel's sins and punishment in 2 Kings xvii. 15, it is said, that "they followed after vanity and became vain." But the statement is true in a wider sense. Worship is sure to breed likeness. A lustful, cruel god will make his devotees so. Men make gods after their own image, and, when made, the gods make men after theirs. The same principle which degrades the idolater lifts the Christian to the likeness of Christ. The aim and effect of adoration is assimilation.

Probably the congregation is now silent, and a single voice takes up the song, with the call, which the hollowness of idolatry makes so urgent and reasonable, to trust in Jehovah, not in vanities. It is thrice repeated, being first addressed to the congregation, then to the house of Aaron, and finally to a wider circle, those who "fear Jehovah." These are most naturally understood as proselytes, and, in the prominence given to them, we see the increasing consciousness in Israel of its Divine destination to be God's witness to the world. Exile had widened the horizon, and fair

hopes that men who were not of Israel's blood would share Israel's faith and shelter under the wings of Israel's God stirred in many hearts. The crash of the triple choral answer to the summons comes with magnificent effect, in the second clauses of vv. 9, 10, 11, triumphantly telling how safe are they who take refuge behind that strong buckler. The same threefold division into *Israel, house of Aaron,* and *they who fear Jehovah* occurs in Psalm cxviii. 2–4, and, with the addition of "house of Levi," in Psalm cxxxv.

Promises of blessing occupy vv. 12–15, which may probably have been sung by priests, or rather by Levites, the musicians of the Temple service. In any case, these benedictions are authoritative assurances from commissioned lips, not utterances of hopeful faith. They are Jehovah's response to Israel's obedience to the preceding summons; swiftly sent, as His answers ever are. Calm certainty that He will bless comes at once into the heart that deeply feels that He is its shield, however His manifestation of outward help may be lovingly delayed. The blessing is parted among those who had severally been called to trust, and had obeyed the call. Universal blessings have special destinations. The fiery mass breaks up into cloven tongues, and sits on each. Distinctions of position make no difference in its reception. Small vessels are filled, and great ones can be no more than full. Cedars and hyssop rejoice in impartial sunshine. Israel, when blessed, increases in number, and there is an inheritance of good from generation to generation. The seal of such hopes is the Name of Him who blesses, "the Maker of heaven and earth," to whose omnipotent, universal sway these impotent gods in human form are as a foil.

Finally, we may hear the united voices of the congregation thus blessed breaking into full-throated praise in vv. 16–18. As in ver. 3 God's dwelling in heaven symbolised His loftiness and power, so here the thought that "the heavens are Jehovah's heavens" implies both the worshippers' trust in His mighty help and their lowliness even in trust. The earth is man's, but by Jehovah's gift. Therefore its inhabitants should remember the terms of their tenure, and thankfully recognise His giving love. But heaven and earth do not include all the universe. There is another region, the land of silence, whither the dead descend. No voice of praise wakes its dumb sleep. (Comp. Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19.) That pensive contemplation, on which the light of the New Testament assurance of Immortality has not shone, gives keener edge to the bliss of present ability to praise Jehovah. We who know that to die is to have a new song put into immortal lips may still be stimulated to fill our brief lives here with the music of thanksgiving, by the thought that, so far as our witness for God to men is concerned, most of us will "descend into silence" when we pass into the grave. Therefore we should shun silence, and bless Him while we live here.

PSALM CXVI.

1 I love—for Jehovah hears
My voice, my supplications.
2 For He has bent His ear to me,
And throughout my days will I call.
3 The cords of death ringed me round,
And the narrows of Sheol found me,
Distress and trouble did I find.
4 And on the name of Jehovah I called,
"I beseech Thee, Jehovah, deliver my soul."

5 Gracious is Jehovah and righteous,
And our God is compassionate.
6 The keeper of the simple is Jehovah,
I was brought low and He saved me.
7 Return, my soul, to thy rest,
For Jehovah has lavished good on thee.
8 For Thou hast delivered my soul from death,
My eye from tears,
My foot from stumbling.
9 I shall walk before Jehovah in the lands of the living.

10 I believed when I [thus] spake,
"I am greatly afflicted."
11 I said in my agitation,
"All men deceive."
12 What shall I return to Jehovah,
[For] all His goodness lavished on me?
13 The cup of salvations will I lift,
And on the name of Jehovah will I call.
14 My vows will I repay to Jehovah,
Oh! may I [do it] before all His people!

15 Precious in the eyes of Jehovah
Is the death of His favoured ones.

16 I beseech Thee, Jehovah—for I am Thy servant,
I am Thy servant, the son of Thy handmaid,
Thou hast loosed my bonds.
17 To Thee will I offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
And on the name of Jehovah will I call.
18 My vows will I repay to Jehovah,
Oh! may I [do it] before all His people!
19 In the courts of the house of Jehovah,
In the midst of thee, Jerusalem.

Hallelujah.

THIS psalm is intensely individual. "I," "me," or "my" occurs in every verse but two (vv. 5, 19). The singer is but recently delivered from some peril, and his song heaves with a ground-swell of emotion after the storm. Hupfeld takes offence at its "continual alternation of petition and recognition of the Divine beneficence and deliverance, or vows of thanksgiving," but surely that very blending is natural to one just rescued and still panting from his danger. Certain grammatical forms indicate a late date, and the frequent allusions to earlier psalms point in the same direction. The words of former psalmists were part of this singer's mental furniture, and came to his lips, when he brought his own thanksgivings. Hupfeld thinks it "strange" that "such a patched-up (*zusammengestoppelter*) psalm" has "imposed" upon commentators, who speak of its depth and tenderness; it is perhaps stranger that its use of older songs has imposed upon so good a critic and hid these characteristics from him. Four parts may be discerned, of which the first (vv. 1–4) mainly describes the psalmist's peril; the second (vv. 5–9), his deliverance; the third glances back to his alarm and thence draws reasons for his vow of praise (vv. 10–14); and the fourth bases the same vow on the remembrance of Jehovah's having loosed his bonds.

The early verses of Psalm xviii. obviously colour the psalmist's description of his distress. That psalm begins with an expression of love to Jehovah, which is echoed here, though a different word is employed. "I love" stands in ver. 1 without an object, just as "I will call" does in ver. 2, and "I believed" and "I spoke" in ver. 10. Probably "Thee" has fallen out, which would be the more easy, as the next word begins with the letter which stands for it in Hebrew. Cheyne follows Graetz in the conjectural adoption of the same beginning as in ver. 10, "I am confident." This change necessitates translating the following "for" as "that," whereas it is plainly to be taken, like the "for" at the beginning of ver. 2, as causal. Ver. 3 is moulded on Psalm xviii. 5, with a modification of the metaphors by the unusual expression "the narrows of Sheol." The word rendered *narrows* may be employed simply as = distress or straits, but it is allowable to take it as picturing that gloomy realm as a confined gorge, like the throat of a pass, from which the psalmist could find no escape. He is like a creature caught in the toils of the hunter Death. The stern rocks of a dark defile have all but closed upon him, but, like a man from the bottom of a pit, he can send out one cry before the earth falls in and buries him. He cried to Jehovah, and the rocks flung his voice heavenwards. Sorrow is meant to drive to God. When cries become prayers, they are not in vain. The revealed character of Jehovah is the ground of a desperate man's hope. His own Name is a plea which Jehovah will certainly honour. Many words are needless when peril is sore and the suppliant is sure of God. To name Him and to cry for deliverance are enough. "I beseech Thee" represents a particle which is used frequently in this

psalm, and by some peculiarities in its use here indicates a late date.

The psalmist does not pause to say definitely that he was delivered, but breaks into the celebration of the Name on which he had called, and from which the certainty of an answer followed. Since Jehovah is gracious, righteous (as strictly adhering to the conditions He has laid down), and merciful (as condescending in love to lowly and imperfect men), there can be no doubt how He will deal with trustful suppliants. The psalmist turns for a moment from his own experience to sun himself in the great thought of the Name, and thereby to come into touch with all who share his faith. The cry for help is wrung out by personal need, but the answer received brings into fellowship with a great multitude. Jehovah's character leads up in ver. 6 to a broad truth as to His acts, for it ensures that He cannot but care for the "simple," whose simplicity lays them open to assailants, and whose single-hearted adhesion to God appeals unfailingly to His heart. Happy the man who, like the psalmist, can give confirmation from his own experience to the broad truths of God's protection to ingenuous and guileless souls! Each individual may, if he will, thus narrow to his own use the widest promises, and put "I" and "me" wherever God has put "whosoever." If he does he will be able to turn his own experience into universal maxims, and encourage others to put "whosoever" where his grateful heart has put "I" and "me."

The deliverance, which is thus the direct result of the Divine character, and which extends to all the simple, and therefore included the psalmist, leads to calm repose. The singer does not say so in cold words, but beautifully wooes his "soul," his sensitive

nature, which had trembled with fear in death's net, to come back to its rest. The word is in the plural, which may be only another indication of late date, but is more worthily understood as expressing the completeness of the repose, which in its fulness is only found in God, and is made the more deep by contrast with previous "agitation."

Vv. 8, 9, are quoted from Psalm lvi. 13 with slight variations, the most significant of which is the change of "light" into "lands." It is noticeable that the Divine deliverance is thus described as surpassing the psalmist's petition. He asked, "Deliver my soul." Bare escape was all that he craved, but he received, not only the deliverance of his soul from death, but, over and above, his tears were wiped away by a loving hand, his feet stayed by a strong arm. God over-answers trustful cries, and does not give the minimum consistent with safety, but the maximum of which we are capable. What shall a grateful heart do with such benefits? "I will walk before Jehovah in the lands of the living," joyously and unconstrainedly (for so the form of the word "walk" implies), as ever conscious of that presence which brings blessedness and requires holiness. The paths appointed may carry the traveller far, but into whatever lands he goes, he will have the same glad heart within to urge his feet and the same loving eye above to beam guidance on him.

The third part (vv. 10–14) recurs to the psalmist's mood in his trouble, and bases on the retrospect of that and of God's mercy the vow of praise. Ver. 10 may be variously understood. The "speaking" may be taken as referring to the preceding expressions of trust or thanksgivings for deliverance. The sentiment would then be that the psalmist was confident that he should

one day thus speak. So Cheyne; or the rendering may be "I believed in that I spake thus"—*i.e.*, that he spake those trustful words of ver. 9 was the result of sheer faith (so Kay). The thing spoken may also be the expressions which follow, and this seems to yield the most satisfactory meaning. "Even when I said, I am afflicted and men fail me, I had not lost my faith." He is re-calling the agitation which shook him, but feels that, through it all, there was an unshaken centre of rest in God. The presence of doubt and fear does not prove the absence of trust. There may live a spark of it, though almost buried below masses of cold unbelief. What he said was the complaint that he was greatly afflicted, and the bitter wail that all men deceive or disappoint. He said so in his agitation (Psalm xxxi. 22). But even in recognising the folly of trusting in men, he was in some measure trusting God, and the trust, though tremulous, was rewarded.

Again he hurries on to sing the issues of deliverance, without waiting to describe it. That little dialogue of the devout soul with itself (vv. 12, 13) goes very deep. It is an illuminative word as to God's character, an emancipating word as to the true notion of service to Him, a guiding word as to common life. For it declares that men honour God most by taking His gifts with recognition of the Giver, and that the return which He in His love seeks is only our thankful reception of His mercy. A giver who desires but these results is surely Love. A religion which consists first in accepting God's gift and then in praising by lip and life Him who gives banishes the religion of fear, of barter, of unwelcome restrictions and commands. It is the exact opposite of the slavery which says, "Thou art an austere man, reaping where thou didst not sow." It

is the religion of which the initial act is faith, and the continual activity, the appropriation of God's spiritual gifts. In daily life there would be less despondency and weakening regrets over vanished blessings, if men were more careful to take and enjoy thankfully all that God gives. But many of us have no eyes for other blessings, because some one blessing is withdrawn or denied. If we treasured all that is given, we should be richer than most of us are.

In ver. 14 the particle of beseeching is added to "before," a singular form of expression which seems to imply desire that the psalmist may come into the temple with his vows. He may have been thinking of the "sacrificial meal in connection with the peace-offerings." In any case, blessings received in solitude should impel to public gratitude. God delivers His suppliants that they may magnify Him before men.

The last part (vv. 15–19) repeats the refrain of ver. 14, but with a different setting. Here the singer generalises his own experience, and finds increase of joy in the thought of the multitude who dwell safe under the same protection. The more usual form of expression for the idea in ver. 15 is "their *blood* is precious" (Psalm lxxii. 14). The meaning is that the death of God's saints is no trivial thing in God's eyes, to be lightly permitted. (Compare the contrasted thought, xliv. 12.) Then, on the basis of that general truth, is built ver. 16, which begins singularly with the same beseeching word which has already occurred in vv. 4 and 14. Here it is not followed by an expressed petition, but is a yearning of desire for continued or fuller manifestation of God's favour. The largest gifts, most fully accepted and most thankfully recognised, still leave room for longing which is not pain, because it is conscious of tender relations with

God that guarantee its fulfilment. "I am Thy servant." Therefore the longing which has no words needs none. "Thou hast loosed my bonds." His thoughts go back to "the cords of death" (ver. 3), which had held him so tightly. God's hand has slackened them, and, by freeing him from that bondage, has bound him more closely than before to Himself. "Being made free from sin, ye became the slaves of righteousness." So, in the full blessedness of received deliverance, the grateful heart offers itself to God, as moved by His mercies to become a living sacrifice, and calls on the Name of Jehovah, in its hour of thankful surrender, as it had called on that Name in its time of deep distress. Once more the lonely suppliant, who had waded such deep waters without companion but Jehovah, seeks to feel himself one of the glad multitude in the courts of the house of Jehovah, and to blend his single voice in the shout of a nation's praise. We suffer and struggle for the most part alone. Grief is a hermit, but Joy is sociable; and thankfulness desires listeners to its praise. The perfect song is the chorus of a great "multitude which no man can number."

PSALM CXVII.

1 Praise Jehovah, all nations,
Laud Him, all peoples.
2 For great is His lovingkindness over us,
And the troth of Jehovah endures for ever.
Hallelujah.

THIS shortest of the psalms is not a fragment, though some MSS. attach it to the preceding nd some to the following psalm. It contains large riches in a narrow room," and its very brevity gives rce to it. Paul laid his finger on its special signi- ance, when he quoted it in proof that God meant His lvation to be for the whole race. Jewish narrowness as an after-growth and a corruption. The historical nitations of God's manifestation to a special nation ere means to its universal diffusion. The fire was thered in a grate, that it might warm the whole house. ll men have a share in what God does for Israel. is grace was intended to fructify through it to all. he consciousness of being the special recipients of ehovah's mercy was saved from abuse, by being united ith the consciousness of being endowed with blessing hat they might diffuse blessing.

Nor is the psalmist's thought of what Israel's ex- erience proclaimed concerning God's character less oteworthy. As often, lovingkindness is united with roth or faithfulness as twin stars which shine out in

all God's dealings with His people. That loving-kindness is "mighty over us"—the word used for *being mighty* has the sense of *prevailing*, and so "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The permanence of the Divine Lovingkindness is guaranteed by God's Troth, by which the fulfilment of every promise and the prolongation of every mercy are sealed to men. These two fair messengers have appeared in yet fairer form than the psalmist knew, and the world has to praise Jehovah for a world-wide gift, first bestowed on and rejected by a degenerate Israel, which thought that it owned the inheritance, and so lost it.

PSALM CXVIII.

1 Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
2 O let Israel say,
That His lovingkindness endures for ever.
3 O let the house of Aaron say,
That His lovingkindness endures for ever.
4 O let those who fear Jah say,
That His lovingkindness endures for ever.

5 Out of the strait place I called on Jah,
Jah answered me [by bringing me out] into an open place.
6 Jehovah is for me, I will not fear,
What can man do to me?
7 Jehovah is for me, as my helper,
And I shall gaze on my haters.

8 Better is it to take refuge in Jehovah
Than to trust in man.
9 Better is it to take refuge in Jehovah
Than to trust in princes.

10 All nations beset me round about;
In the name of Jehovah will I cut them down.
11 They have beset me round about, yea, round about beset me;
In the name of Jehovah will I cut them down.
12 They beset me round about like bees,
They were extinguished like a thorn fire;
In the name of Jehovah will I cut them down.
13 Thou didst thrust sore at me that I might fall
But Jehovah helped me.
14 Jah is my strength and song,
And He is become my salvation.

15 The sound of shrill shouts of joy and salvation is [heard] in
the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of Jehovah does prowess.
16 The right hand of Jehovah is exalted,
The right hand of Jehovah does prowess.

17 I shall not die, but live,
And I tell forth the works of Jah.
18 Jah has chastened me sore,
But to death He has not given me up.
19 Open ye to me the gates of righteousness,
I will go in by them, I will thank Jah.

20 This is the gate of Jehovah:
The righteous may go in by it.

21 I will thank Thee, for Thou hast answered me,
And art become my salvation.

22 The stone [which] the builders rejected
Is become the head [stone] of the corner.
23 From Jehovah did this come to pass,
It is wonderful in our eyes.
24 This is the day [which] Jehovah has made,
Let us leap for joy and be glad in it.

25 O, I beseech Thee, Jehovah, save, I beseech;
O, I beseech Thee, Jehovah, give prosperity.

26 Blessed be he that comes in the name of Jehovah,
We bless you from the house of Jehovah.
27 Jehovah is God, and He has given us light;
Order the bough-bearing procession,—
To the horns of the altar!

28 My God art Thou, and I will thank Thee,
My God, I will exalt Thee.

29 Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.

THIS is unmistakably a psalm for use in the Temple worship, and probably meant to be sung antiphonally, on some day of national rejoicing (ver. 24). A general concurrence of opinion points to the period

of the Restoration from Babylon as its date, as in the case of many psalms in this Book V., but different events connected with that restoration have been selected. The psalm implies the completion of the Temple, and therefore shuts out any point prior to that. Delitzsch fixes on the dedication of the Temple as the occasion; but the view is still more probable which supposes that it was sung on the great celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, recorded in Neh. viii. 14–18. In later times ver. 25 was the festal cry raised while the altar of burnt-offering was solemnly compassed, once on each of the first six days of the Feast of Tabernacles, and seven times on the seventh. This seventh day was called the "Great Hosanna; and not only the prayers at the Feast of Tabernacles, but even the branches of osiers (including the myrtles), which are bound to the palm branch (*Lulab*), were called Hosannas" (Delitzsch). The allusions in the psalm fit the circumstances of the time in question. Stier, Perowne, and Baethgen concur in preferring this date: the last-named critic, who is very slow to recognise indications of specific dates, speaks with unwonted decisiveness, when he writes, "I believe that I can say with certainty, Psalm cxviii. was sung for the first time at the Feast of Tabernacles in the year 444 B.C." Cheyne follows his usual guides in pointing to the purification and reconstruction of the Temple by Judas Maccabæus as "fully adequate to explain alike the tone and the expressions." He is "the terrible hero," to whose character the refrain, "In the name of Jehovah I will cut them down," corresponds. But the allusions in the psalm are quite as appropriate to any other times of national jubilation and yet of danger, such as that of the Restoration, and

Judas the Maccabee had no monopoly of the warrior trust which flames in that refrain.

Apparently the psalm falls into two halves, of which the former (vv. 1–16) seems to have been sung as a processional hymn while approaching the sanctuary, and the latter (vv. 17–29), partly at the Temple gates, partly by a chorus of priests within, and partly by the procession when it had entered. Every reader recognises traces of antiphonal singing; but it is difficult to separate the parts with certainty. A clue may possibly be found by noting that verses marked by the occurrence of "I," "me," and "my" are mingled with others more impersonal. The personified nation is clearly the speaker of the former class of verses, which tells a connected story of distress, deliverance, and grateful triumph; while the other less personal verses generalise the experience of the first speaker, and sustain substantially the part of the chorus in a Greek play. In the first part of the psalm we may suppose that a part of the procession sang the one and another portion the other series; while in the second part (vv. 17–29) the more personal verses were sung by the whole *cortège* arrived at the Temple, and the more generalised other part was taken by a chorus of priests or Levites within the sanctuary. This distribution of verses is occasionally uncertain, but on the whole is clear, and aids the understanding of the psalm.

First rings out from the full choir the summons to praise, which peculiarly belonged to the period of the Restoration (Ezra iii. 11; Psalms cvi. 1, cvii. 1). As in Psalm cxv., three classes are called on: the whole house of Israel, the priests, and "those who fear Jehovah"—*i.e.*, aliens who have taken refuge beneath the wings of Israel's God. The threefold designation

expresses the thrill of joy in the recovery of national life; the high estimate of the priesthood as the only remaining God-appointed order, now that the monarchy was swept away; and the growing desire to draw the nations into the community of God's people.

Then, with ver. 5, the single voice begins. His experience, now to be told, is the reason for the praise called for in the previous verses. It is the familiar sequence reiterated in many a psalm and many a life,—distress, or "a strait place" (Psalm cxvi. 3), a cry to Jehovah, His answer by enlargement, and a consequent triumphant confidence, which has warrant in the past for believing that no hand can hurt him whom Jehovah's hand helps. Many a man passes through the psalmist's experience without thereby achieving the psalmist's settled faith and power to despise threatening calamities. We fail both in recounting clearly to ourselves our deliverances and in drawing assurance from them for the future. Ver. 5 *b* is a pregnant construction. He "answered me in [or, into] an open place"—*i.e.*, by bringing me into it. The contrast of a narrow gorge and a wide plain picturesquely expresses past restraints and present freedom of movement. Ver. 6 is taken from Psalm lvi. 9, 11; and ver. 7 is influenced by Psalm liv. 4, and reproduces the peculiar expression occurring there, "Jehovah is among my helpers,"—on which compare remarks on that passage.

Vv. 8, 9, are impersonal, and generalise the experience of the preceding verses. They ring out loud, like a trumpet, and are the more intense for reiteration. Israel was but a feeble handful. Its very existence seemed to depend on the caprice of the protecting kings who had permitted its return. It had had bitter experience of the unreliableness of a monarch's whim

Now, with superb reliance, which was felt by the psalmist to be the true lesson of the immediate past, it peals out its choral confidence in Jehovah with a "heroism of faith which may well put us to the blush." These verses surpass the preceding in that they avow that faith in Jehovah makes men independent of human helpers, while the former verses declared that it makes superior to mortal foes. Fear of and confidence in man are both removed by trust in God. But it is perhaps harder to be weaned from the confidence than to rise above the fear.

The individual experience is resumed in vv. 10–14. The energetic reduplications strengthen the impression of multiplied attacks, corresponding with the facts of the Restoration period. The same impression is accentuated by the use in ver. 11 *a* of two forms of the same verb, and in ver. 12 *a* by the metaphor of a swarm of angry bees (Deut. i. 44). Numerous, venomous, swift, and hard to strike at as the enemies were, buzzing and stinging around, they were but insects after all, and a strong hand could crush them. The psalmist does not merely look to God to interpose for him, as in vv. 6, 7, but expects that God will give him power to conquer by the use of his own strengthened arm. We are not only objects of Divine protection, but organs of Divine power. Trusting in the revealed character of Jehovah, we shall find conquering energy flowing into us from Him, and the most fierce assaults will die out as quickly as a fire of dry thorn twigs, which sinks into ashes the sooner the more it crackles and blazes. Then the psalmist individualises the multitude of foes, just as the collective Israel is individualised, and brings assailants and assailed down to two antagonists, engaged in desperate duel. But

a third Person intervenes. "Jehovah helped me" (ver. 13); as in old legends, the gods on their immortal steeds charged at the head of the hosts of their worshippers. Thus delivered, the singer breaks into the ancient strain, which had gone up on the shores of the sullen sea that rolled over Pharaoh's army, and is still true after centuries have intervened: "Jah is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation." Miriam sang it, the restored exiles sang it, tried and trustful men in every age have sung and will sing it, till there are no more foes; and then, by the shores of the sea of glass mingled with fire, the calm victors will lift again the undying "song of Moses and of the Lamb."

Vv. 15, 16, are probably best taken as sung by the chorus, generalising and giving voice to the emotions excited by the preceding verses. The same reiteration which characterised vv. 8, 9, reappears here. Two broad truths are built on the individual voice's autobiography: namely, that trust in Jehovah and consequent conformity to His law are never in vain, but always issue in joy; and that God's power, when put forth, always conquers. "The tents of the righteous" may possibly allude to the "tabernacles" constructed for the feast, at which the song was probably sung.

Vv. 17–19 belong to the individual voice. The procession has reached the Temple. Deeper thoughts than before now mark the retrospect of past trial and deliverance. Both are recognised to be from Jehovah. It is He who has corrected, severely indeed, but still "in measure, not to bring to nothing, but to make capable and recipient of fuller life." The enemy thrust sore, with intent to make Israel fall; but God's strokes are meant to make us stand the firmer. It is beautiful

that all thought of human foes has faded away, and God only is seen in all the sorrow. But His chastisement has wider purposes than individual blessedness. It is intended to make its objects the heralds of His name to the world. Israel is beginning to lay to heart more earnestly its world-wide vocation to "tell forth the works of Jehovah." The imperative obligation of all who have received delivering help from Him is to become missionaries of His name. The reed is cut and pared thin and bored with hot irons, and the very pith of it extracted, that it may be fit to be put to the owner's lips, and give out music from his breath. Thus conscious of its vocation and eager to render its due of sacrifice and praise, Israel asks that "the gates of righteousness" may be opened for the entrance of the long procession. The Temple doors are so called, because Righteousness is the condition of entrance (Isa. xxvi. 2: compare Psalm xxiv.).

Ver. 20 may belong to the individual voice, but is perhaps better taken as the answer from within the Temple, of the priests or Levites who guarded the closed doors, and who now proclaim what must be the character of those who would tread the sacred courts. The gate (not as in ver. 19, *gates*) belongs to Jehovah, and therefore access by it is permitted to none but the righteous. That is an everlasting truth. It is possible to translate, "This is the gate *to* Jehovah" —*i.e.*, by which one comes to His presence; and that rendering would bring out still more emphatically the necessity of the condition laid down: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

The condition is supposed to be met; for in ver. 21 the individual voice again breaks into thanksgiving, for being allowed once more to stand in the house of

Jehovah. "Thou hast answered me": the psalmist had already sung that Jah had answered him (ver. 5). "And art become my salvation": he had already hailed Jehovah as having become such (ver. 14). God's deliverance is not complete till full communion with Him is enjoyed. Dwelling in His house is the crown of all His blessings. We are set free from enemies, from sins and fears and struggles, that we may abide for ever with Him, and only then do we realise the full sweetness of His redeeming hand, when we stand in His presence and commune evermore with Him.

Vv. 22, 23, 24, probably belong to the priestly chorus. They set forth the great truth made manifest by restored Israel's presence in the rebuilt Temple. The metaphor is suggested by the incidents connected with the rebuilding. The "stone" is obviously Israel, weak, contemptible, but now once more laid as the very foundation stone of God's house in the world. The broad truth taught by its history is that God lays as the basis of His building—*i.e.*, uses for the execution of His purposes—that which the wisdom of man despises and tosses aside. There had been abundant faint-heartedness among even the restored exiles. The nations around had scoffed at these "feeble Jews," and the scoffs had not been without echoes in Israel itself. Chiefly, the men of position and influence, who ought to have strengthened drooping courage, had been infected with the tendency to rate low the nation's power, and to think that their enterprise was destined to disaster. But now the Temple is built, and the worshippers stand in it. What does that teach but that all has been God's doing? So wonderful is it, so far beyond expectation, that the very objects of such marvellous intervention are amazed to find themselves

where they stand. So rooted is our tendency to unbelief that, when God does what He has sworn to do, we are apt to be astonished with a wonder which reveals the greatness of our past incredulity. No man who trusts God ought to be surprised at God's answers to trust.

The general truth contained here is that of Paul's great saying, "God hath chosen the weak things of the world that He might put to shame the things that are strong." It is the constant law, not because God chooses unfit instruments, but because the world's estimates of fitness are false, and the qualities which it admires are irrelevant with regard to His designs, while the requisite qualities are of another sort altogether. Therefore, it is a law which finds its highest exemplification in *the* foundation for God's true temple, other than which can no man lay. "Israel is not only a figure of Christ—there is an organic unity between Him and them. Whatever, therefore, is true of Israel in a lower sense is true in its highest sense of Christ. If Israel is the rejected stone made the head of the corner, this is far truer of Him who was indeed rejected of men, but chosen of God and precious, the corner stone of the one great living temple of the redeemed" (Perowne).

Ver. 24 is best regarded as the continuation of the choral praise in vv. 22, 23. "The day" is that of the festival now in process, the joyful culmination of God's manifold deliverances. It is a day in which joy is duty, and no heart has a right to be too heavy to leap for gladness. Private sorrows enough many of the jubilant worshippers no doubt had, but the sight of the Stone laid as the head of the corner should bring joy even to such. If sadness was ingratitude and

almost treason then, what sorrow should now be so dense that it cannot be pierced by the Light which lighteth every man? The joy of the Lord should float, like oil on stormy waves, above our troublous sorrows, and smooth their tossing.

Again the single voice rises, but not now in thanksgiving, as might have been expected, but in plaintive tones of earnest imploring (ver. 25). Standing in the sanctuary, Israel is conscious of its perils, its need, its weakness, and so with pathetic reiteration of the particle of entreaty, which occurs twice in each clause of the verse, cries for continued deliverance from continuing evils, and for prosperity in the course opening before it. The "day" in which unmingled gladness inspires our songs has not yet dawned, fair as are the many days which Jehovah has made. In the earthly house of the Lord thanksgiving must ever pass into petition. An unending day comes, when there will be nothing to dread, and no need for the sadder notes occasioned by felt weakness and feared foes.

Vv. 26, 27, come from the chorus of priests, who welcome the entering procession, and solemnly pronounce on them the benediction of Jehovah. They answer, in His name, the prayer of ver. 25, and bless the single leader of the procession and the multitudes following. The use of ver. 26 *a* and of the "Hosanna" (an attempted transliteration of the Hebrew "Save I beseech") from ver. 25 at Christ's entrance into Jerusalem probably shows that the psalm was regarded as Messianic. It is so, in virtue of the relation already referred to between Israel and Christ. He "cometh in the name of Jehovah" in a deeper sense than did Israel, the servant of the Lord.

Ver. 27 *a* recalls the priestly benediction (Numb. vi.

25), and thankfully recognises its ample fulfilment in Israel's history, and especially in the dawning of new prosperity now. Ver. 27 *b*, *c*, is difficult. Obviously it should be a summons to worship, as thanksgiving for the benefits acknowledged in *a*. But what is the act of worship intended is hard to say. The rendering "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar," has against it the usual meaning of the word rendered *sacrifice*, which is rather *festival*, and the fact that the last words of the verse cannot possibly be translated "*to* the horns," etc., but must mean "as far as" or "even up to the horns," etc. There must therefore be a good deal supplied in the sentence; and commentators differ as to how to fill the gap. Delitzsch supposes that "the number of the sacrificial animals is to be so great that the whole space of the courts of the priests becomes full of them, and the binding of them has therefore to take place even up to the horns of the altar." Perowne takes the expression to be a pregnant one for "till [the victim] is sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the horns of the altar." So Hupfeld, following Chaldee and some Jewish interpreters. Others regard the supposed ellipsis as too great to be natural, and take an entirely different view. The word rendered *sacrifice* in the former explanation is taken to mean a *procession* round the altar, which is etymologically justifiable, and is supported by the known custom of making such a circuit during the Feast of Tabernacles. For "cords" this explanation would read *branches* or *boughs*, which is also warranted. But what does "binding a procession with boughs" mean? Various answers are given. Cheyne supposes that the branches borne in the hands of the members of the procession were in some unknown way used to bind or link them

together before they left the Temple. Baethgen takes "with boughs" as = "bearing boughs," with which he supposes that the bearers touched the altar horns, for the purpose of transferring to themselves the holiness concentrated there. Either explanation has difficulties, —the former in requiring an unusual sense for the word rendered *sacrifice*; the latter in finding a suitable meaning for that translated *bind*. In either *c* is but loosely connected with *b*, and is best understood as an exclamation. The verb rendered *bind* is used in 1 Kings xx. 14, 2 Chron. xiii. 3, in a sense which fits well with "procession" here—*i.e.*, that of marshalling an army for battle. If this meaning is adopted, *b* will be the summons to order the bough-bearing procession, and *c* a call to march onwards, so as to encircle the altar. This meaning of the obscure verse may be provisionally accepted, while owning that our ignorance of the ceremonial referred to prevents complete understanding of the words.

Once more Miriam's song supplies ancient language of praise for recent mercies, and the personified Israel compasses the altar with thanksgiving (ver. 28). Then the whole multitude, both of those who had come up to the Temple and of those who had welcomed them there, join in the chorus of praise with which the psalm begins and ends, and which was so often pealed forth in those days of early joy for the new manifestations of that Lovingkindness which endures through all days, both those of past evil and those of future hoped-for good.

PSALM CXIX.

IT is lost labour to seek for close continuity or progress in this psalm. One thought pervades it—the surpassing excellence of the Law; and the beauty and power of the psalm lie in the unwearied reiteration of that single idea. There is music in its monotony, which is subtilely varied. Its verses are like the ripples on a sunny sea, alike and impressive in their continual march, and yet each catching the light with a difference, and breaking on the shore in a tone of its own. A few elements are combined into these hundred and seventy-six gnomic sentences. One or other of the usual synonyms for the Law—viz., word, saying, statutes, commandments, testimonies, judgments—occurs in every verse, except vv. 122 and 132. The prayers "Teach me, revive me, preserve me—according to Thy word," and the vows "I will keep, observe, meditate on, delight in—Thy law," are frequently repeated. There are but few pieces in the psalmist's kaleidoscope, but they fall into many shapes of beauty; and though all his sentences are moulded after the same general plan, the variety within such narrow limits is equally a witness of poetic power which turns the fetters of the acrostic structure into helps, and of devout heartfelt love for the Law of Jehovah.

The psalm is probably of late date; but its allusions

to the singer's circumstances, whether they are taken as autobiographical or as having reference to the nation, are too vague to be used as clues to the period of its composition. An early poet is not likely to have adopted such an elaborate acrostic plan, and the praises of the Law naturally suggest a time when it was familiar in an approximately complete form. It may be that the rulers referred to in vv. 23, 46, were foreigners, but the expression is too general to draw a conclusion from. It may be that the double-minded (ver. 113), who err from God's statutes (ver. 118), and forsake His law (ver. 53), are Israelites who have yielded to the temptations to apostatise, which came with the early Greek period, to which Baethgen, Cheyne, and others would assign the psalm. But these expressions, too, are of so general a nature that they do not give clear testimony of date.

§ ℵ

1 Blessed the perfect in [their] way,
Who walk in the law of Jehovah!
2 Blessed they who keep His testimonies,
That seek Him with the whole heart,
3 [Who] also have done no iniquity,
[But] have walked in His ways!
4 Thou hast commanded Thy precepts,
That we should observe them diligently.
5 O that my ways were established
To observe Thy statutes!
6 Then shall I not be ashamed,
When I give heed to all Thy commandments.
7 I will thank Thee with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Thy righteous judgments.
8 Thy statutes will I observe;
Forsake me not utterly.

The first three verses are closely connected. They set forth in general terms the elements of the blessed-

ness of the doers of the Law. To walk in it—*i.e.*, to order the active life in conformity with its requirements —ensures perfectness. To keep God's testimonies is at once the consequence and the proof of seeking Him with whole-hearted devotion and determination. To walk in His ways is the preservative from evil-doing. And such men cannot but be blessed with a deep sacred blessedness, which puts to shame coarse and turbulent delights, and feeds its pure fires from God Himself. Whether these verses are taken as exclamation or declaration, they lead up naturally to ver. 4, which reverently gazes upon the loving act of God in the revelation of His will in the Law, and bethinks itself of the obligations bound on us by that act. It is of God's mercy that He has commanded, and His words are meant to sway our wills, since He has broken the awful silence, not merely to instruct us, but to command; and nothing short of practical obedience will discharge our duties to His revelation. So the psalmist betakes himself to prayer, that he may be helped to realise the purpose of God in giving the Law. His contemplation of the blessedness of obedience and of the Divine act of declaring His will moves him to longing, and his consciousness of weakness and wavering makes the longing into prayer that his wavering may be consolidated into fixity of purpose and continuity of obedience. When a man's ways are established to observe, they will be established by observing, God's statutes. For nothing can put to the blush one whose eye is directed to these.

> "Whatever record leap to light,
> He never shall be shamed."

Nor will he cherish hopes that fail, nor desires that

when accomplished, are bitter of taste. To give heed to the commandments is the condition of learning them and recognising how righteous they are; and such learning makes the learner's heart righteous like them, and causes it to run over in thankfulness for the boon of knowledge of God's will. By all these thoughts the psalmist is brought to his fixed resolve in ver. 8, to do what God meant him to do when He gave the Law; and what the singer had just longed that he might be able to do—namely, to observe the statutes. But in his resolve he remembers his weakness, and therefore he glides into prayer for that Presence without which resolves are transient and abortive.

§ ב

9 Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his path?
By taking heed, according to Thy word.
10 With my whole heart have I sought Thee,
Let me not wander from Thy commandments.
11 In my heart have I hid Thy saying,
That I may not sin against Thee.
12 Blessed art Thou, Jehovah,
Teach me Thy statutes.
13 With my lips have I rehearsed
All the judgments of Thy mouth.
14 In the way of Thy testimonies have I rejoiced,
As over all [kinds of] wealth.
15 In Thy precepts will I meditate,
And will have respect to all Thy paths.
16 In Thy statutes will I delight myself,
I will not forget Thy word.

The inference drawn from ver. 9, that the psalmist was a young man, is precarious. The language would be quite as appropriate to an aged teacher desirous of guiding impetuous youth to sober self-control. While some verses favour the hypothesis of the author's youth (ver. 141, and perhaps vv. 99, 100), the tone of the whole,

its rich experience and comprehensive grasp of the manifold relations of the Law to life, imply maturity of years and length of meditation. The psalm is the ripe fruit of a life which is surely past its spring. But it is extremely questionable whether these apparently personal traits are really so. Much rather is the poet "thinking . . . of the individuals of different ages and spiritual attainments who may use his works" (Cheyne, *in loc.*).

The word rendered "By taking heed" has already occurred in vv. 4, 5 ("observe"). The careful study of the Word must be accompanied with as careful study of self. The object observed there was the Law; here, it is the man himself. Study God's law, says the psalmist, and study Thyself in its light; so shall youthful impulses be bridled, and the life's path be kept pure. That does not sound so like a young man's thought as an old man's maxim, in which are crystallised many experiences.

The rest of the section intermingles petitions, professions, and vows, and is purely personal. The psalmist claims that he is one of those whom he has pronounced blessed, inasmuch as he *has* "sought" God with his "whole heart." Such longing is no mere idle aspiration, but must be manifested in obedience, as ver. 2 has declared. If a man longs for God, he will best find Him by doing His will. But no heart-desire is so rooted as to guarantee that it shall not die, nor is past obedience a certain pledge of a like future. Wherefore the psalmist prays, not in reliance on his past, but in dread that he may falsify it, "Let me not wander." He had not only sought God in his heart, but had there hid God's law, as its best treasure, and as an inward power controlling and stimulating. Evil cannot flow from a heart in which God's law is lodged. That

is the tree which sweetens the waters of the fountain. But the cry "Teach me Thy statutes" would be but faltering, if the singer could not rise above himself, and take heart by gazing upon God, whose own great character is the guarantee that He will not leave a seeking soul in ignorance.

Professions and vows now take the place of petitions. "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and the word hid in it will certainly not be concealed. It is buried deep, that it may grow high. It is hidden, that it may come abroad. Therefore ver. 13 tells of bold utterance, which is as incumbent on men as obedient deeds.

A sane estimate of earthly good will put it decisively below the knowledge of God and of His will. Lives which despise what the world calls riches, because they are smitten with the desire of any sort of wisdom, are ever nobler than those which keep the low levels. And highest of all is the life which gives effect to its conviction that man's true treasure is to know God's mind and will. To rejoice in His testimonies is to have wealth that cannot be lost and pleasures that cannot wither. That glad estimate will surely lead to happy meditation on them, by which their worth shall be disclosed and their sweep made plain. The miser loves to tell his gold; the saint, to ponder his wealth in God. The same double direction of the mind, already noted, reappears in ver. 15, where quiet meditation on God's statutes is associated with attention to the ways which are called His, as being pointed out by, and pleasing to, Him, but are ours, as being walked in by us. Inward delight in, and practical remembrance of, the Law are vowed in ver. 16, which covers the whole field of contemplative and active life.

§ 3

17 **Deal bountifully with Thy servant, that I may live,**
So will I observe Thy word.
18 **Open my eyes, that I may behold**
Wonders out of Thy law.
19 **A stranger am I on the earth,**
Hide not from me Thy commandments.
20 **Crushed is my soul with longing**
Towards Thy judgments at all times.
21 **Thou hast rebuked the proud [so that they are] cursed,**
Those who wander from Thy commandments.
22 **Remove from me reproach and shame,**
For Thy testimonies do I keep.
23 **Princes also sit and speak with one another against me,**
Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes.
24 **Also Thy testimonies are my delight,**
The men of my counsel.

In ver. 17 the psalmist desires continued life, mainly because it affords the opportunity of continued obedience. He will "observe Thy word," not only in token of gratitude, but because to him life is precious chiefly because in its activities he can serve God. Such a reason for wishing to live may easily change to a willingness to die, as it did with Paul, who had learned that a better obedience was possible when he had passed through the dark gates, and therefore could say, "To die is gain." Vv. 18, 19, are connected, in so far as the former desires subjective illumination and the latter objective revelation. Opened eyes are useless, if commandments are hidden; and the disclosure of the latter is in vain unless there are eyes to see them. Two great truths lie in the former petition—namely, that scales cover our spiritual vision which only God can take away, and that His revelation has in its depths truths and treasures which can only be discerned by His help. The cognate petition in ver. 19

is based upon the pathetic thought that man is a stranger on earth, and therefore needs what will take away his sense of homelessness and unrest. All other creatures are adapted to their environments, but he has a consciousness that he is an exile here, a haunting, stinging sense, which vaguely feels after repose in his native land. "Thy commandments" can still it. To know God's will, with knowledge which is acceptance and love, gives rest, and makes every place a mansion in the Father's house.

There may possibly be a connection between vv. 20 and 21—the terrible fate of those who wander from the commandments, as described in the latter verse, being the motive for the psalmist's longing expressed in the former. The "judgments" for which he longed, with a yearning which seemed to bruise his soul are not, as might be supposed, God's judicial acts, but the word is a synonym for "commandments," as throughout the psalm.

The last three verses of the section appear to be linked together. They relate to the persecutions of the psalmist for his faithfulness to God's law. In ver. 22 he prays that reproach and shame, which wrapped him like a covering, may be lifted from him; and his plea in ver. 22*b* declares that he lay under these because he was true to God's statutes. In ver. 23 we see the source of the reproach and shame, in the conclave of men in authority, whether foreign princes or Jewish rulers, who were busy slandering him and plotting his ruin; while, with wonderful beauty, the contrasted picture in *b* shows the object of that busy talk, sitting silently absorbed in meditation on the higher things of God's statutes. As long as a man can do that, he has a magic circle drawn round him, across which

fears and cares cannot step. Ver. 24 heightens the impression of the psalmist's rest. "Also Thy testimonies are my delight"—not only the subjects of his meditation, but bringing inward sweetness, though earth is in arms against him; and not only are they his delights, but "the men of his counsel," in whom he, solitary as he is, finds companionship that arms him with resources against that knot of whispering enemies.

§ ד

25 My soul cleaves to the dust,
Revive me according to Thy word.
26 My ways I told and Thou answeredst me,
Teach me Thy statutes.
27 The way of Thy precepts make me understand,
And I will meditate on Thy wonders.
28 My soul weeps itself away for grief,
Raise me up according to Thy word.
29 The way of lying remove from me,
And [with] Thy law be gracious to me.
30 The way of faithfulness I have chosen,
Thy judgments have I set [before me].
31 I have cleaved to Thy testimonies;
Jehovah, put me not to shame.
32 The way of Thy commandments will I run,
For Thou dost enlarge my heart.

The exigencies of the acrostic plan are very obvious in this section, five of the verses of which begin with "way" or "ways," and two of the remaining three with "cleaves." The variety secured under such conditions is remarkable. The psalmist's soul cleaves to the dust—*i.e.*, is bowed in mourning (cf. xliv. 25); but still, though thus darkened by sorrow and weeping itself away for grief (ver. 28), it cleaves to "Thy testimonies" (ver. 31). Happy in their sorrow are they who, by reason of the force which bows their sensitive nature to the dust, cling the more closely in

their true selves to the declared will of God! Their sorrow appeals to God's heart, and is blessed if it dictates the prayer for His quickening (ver. 25). Their cleaving to His law warrants their hope that He will not put them to shame.

The first pair of verses in which "way" is the acrostic word (vv. 26, 27) sets "my ways" over against "the way of Thy precepts." The psalmist has made God his confidant, telling Him all his life's story, and has found continual answers, in gifts of mercy and inward whispers. He asks, therefore, for further illumination, which will be in accordance with these past mutual communications. Tell God thy ways and He will teach thee His statutes. The franker our confession, the more fervent our longing for fuller knowledge of His will. "The way of Thy precepts" is the practical life according to these, the ideal which shall rebuke and transform "my ways." The singer's crooked course is spread before God, and he longs to see clearly the straight path of duty, on which he vows that he will meditate, and find wonders in the revelation of God's will. Many a sunbeam is wasted for want of intent eyes. The prayer for understanding is vain without the vow of pondering. The next pair of "way-" verses (vv. 29, 30) contrasts ways of "lying" and of "faithfulness"—*i.e.*, sinful life which is false towards God and erroneous in its foundation maxims, and life which is true in practice to Him and to man's obligations. The psalmist prays that the former may be put far from him; for he feels that it is only too near, and his unhelped feet too ready to enter on it. He recognises the inmost meaning of the Law as an outcome of God's favour. It is not harsh, but glowing with love, God's best gift. The prayer in ver. 29 has

the psalmist's deliberate choice in ver. 30 as its plea. That choice does not lift him above the need of God's help, and it gives him a claim thereon. Our wills may seem fixed, but the gap between choice and practice is wide, and our feebleness will not bridge it, unless He strengthens us. So the last verse of this section humbly vows to transform meditation and choice into action, and to "run the way of God's commandments," in thanksgiving for the joy with which, while the psalmist prays, he feels that his heart swells.

§ ה

33 Teach me, Jehovah, the way of Thy statutes,
And I will keep it to the end.
34 Make me understand so that I may keep Thy law,
And I will observe it with [my] whole heart.
35 Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments,
For in it I delight.
36 Incline my heart to Thy testimonies,
And not to plunder.
37 Make my eyes go aside from beholding vanity,
In Thy ways revive me.
38 Confirm to Thy servant Thy promise,
Which tends to Thy fear.
39 Make my reproach pass away which I dread,
For Thy judgments are good.
40 Behold, I have longed for Thy precepts,
In Thy righteousness revive me.

Vv. 33 and 34 are substantially identical in their prayer for enlightenment and their vow of obedience. Both are based on the conviction that outward revelation is incomplete without inward illumination. Both recognise the necessary priority of enlightened reason as condition of obedient action, and such action as the test and issue of enlightenment. Both vow that knowledge shall not remain barren. They differ in that the former verse pledges the psalmist to obedience

unlimited in time and the latter to obedience without reservation. But even in uttering his vow the singer remembers his need of God's help to keep it, and turns it, in ver. 35, into petition, which he very significantly grounds on his heart's delight in the Law. Warm as that delight may be, circumstances and flesh will cool it, and it is ever a struggle to translate desires into deeds. Therefore we need the sweet constraint of our Divine Helper to make us walk in the right way. Again, in ver. 36 the preceding profession is caught up and modulated into petition. "Incline my heart" stands to "In it I delight," just as "Make me walk" does to "I will observe it." Our purest joys in God and in His Will depend on Him for their permanence and increase. Our hearts are apt to spill their affection on the earth, even while we would bear the cup filled to God. And one chief rival of "Thy testimonies" is worldly gain, from which there must be forcible detachment in order to, and as accompaniment of, attachment to God. All possessions which come between us and Him are "plunder," unjust gain.

The heart is often led astray by the eyes. The senses bring fuel to its unholy flames. Therefore, the next petition (ver. 37) asks that they may be made, as it were, to pass on one side of tempting things, which are branded as being "vanity," without real substance or worth, however they may glitter and solicit the gaze. To look longingly on earth's good makes us torpid in God's ways; and to be earnest in the latter makes us dead to the former. There is but one real life for men, the life of union with God and of obedience to His commandments. Therefore, the singer prays to be revived in God's ways. Experience of God's faithfulness to His plighted word will do much to deliver from

earth's glamour, as ver. 38 implies. The second clause is elliptical in Hebrew, and is now usually taken as above, meaning that God's promise fulfilled leads men to reverence Him. But the rendering "who is [devoted] to Thy fear" is tenable and perhaps better. The "reproach" in ver. 39 is probably that which would fall on the psalmist if he were unfaithful to God's law. This interpretation gives the best meaning to ver. 39 *b*, which would then contain the reason for his desire to keep the "judgments"—*i.e.*, the commandments, not the judicial acts—which he feels to be good. The section ends with a constantly recurring strain. God's righteousness, His strict discharge of all obligations, guarantees that no longing, turned to Him, can be left unsatisfied. The languishing desire will be changed into fuller joy of more vigorous life. The necessary precursor of deeper draughts from the Fountain of Life is thirst for it, which faithfully turns aside from earth's sparkling but drugged potions.

§ 1

41 And let Thy lovingkindnesses come to me, Jehovah,
Thy salvation according to Thy promise.
42 And I shall have a word to answer him that reproaches me,
For I trust in Thy word.
43 And pluck not the word of truth out of my mouth utterly,
For I have waited for Thy judgments.
44 And I would observe Thy law continually,
For ever and aye.
45 And I would walk at liberty,
For I have sought Thy precepts.
46 And I would speak of Thy testimonies before kings,
And not be ashamed.
47 And I will delight myself in Thy judgments,
Which I love.
48 And I will lift up my palms to Thy commandments [which I love],
And meditate on Thy statutes.

There are practically no Hebrew words beginning with the letter required as the initial in this section, except the copula "and.' Each verse begins with it, and it is best to retain it in translation, so as to reproduce in some measure the original impression of uniformity. The verses are aggregated rather than linked. "And" sometimes introduces a consequence, as probably in ver. 42, and sometimes is superfluous in regard to the sense. A predominant reference to the duty of bearing witness to the Truth runs through the section. The prayer in ver. 41 for the visits of God's lovingkindnesses which, in their sum, make salvation, and are guaranteed by His word of promise, is urged on the ground that, by experience of these, the psalmist will have his answer ready for all carpers who scoff at him and his patient faith. Such a prayer is entirely accordant with the hypothesis that the speaker is the collective Israel, but not less so with the supposition that he is an individual. "Whereas I was blind, now I see" is an argument that silences sarcasm. Ver. 43 carries on the thought of witnessing and asks that "the word of truth"—*i.e.*, the Law considered as disclosure of truth rather than of duty—may not be snatched from the witness's mouth, as it would be if God's promised lovingkindnesses failed him. The condition of free utterance is rich experience. If prayers had gone up in vain from the psalmist's lips, no glad proclamation could come from them.

The verbs at the beginnings of vv. 44–46 are best taken as optatives, expressing what the psalmist would fain do, and, to some extent, has done. There is no true religion without that longing for unbroken conformity with the manifest will of God. Whoever makes that his deepest desire, and seeks after God's precepts,

will "walk at liberty," or *at large*, for restraints that are loved are not bonds, and freedom consists not in doing as I would, but in willing to do as I ought. Strong in such emancipation from the hindrances of one's own passions, and triumphant over external circumstances which may mould, but not dominate, a God-obeying life, the psalmist would fain open his mouth unabashed before rulers. The "kings" spoken of in ver. 46 may be foreign rulers, possibly the representatives of the Persian monarch, or later alien sovereigns, or the expression may be quite general, and the speaker be a private person, who feels his courage rising as he enters into the liberty of perfect submission.

Vv. 47, 48, are general expressions of delight in the Law. Lifting the hands towards the commandments seems to be a figure for reverent regard, or longing, as one wistfully stretches them out towards some dear person or thing that one would fain draw closer. The phrase "which I love" in ver. 48 overweights the clause, and is probably a scribe's erroneous repetition of 47 *b*.

§ ז

49 Remember the word to Thy servant,
On which Thou hast caused me to hope.
50 This is my comfort in my affliction,
That Thy promise has given me life.
51 The proud have derided me exceedingly,
From Thy law I have not declined.
52 I have remembered Thy judgments [which are] from of old, Jehovah,
And I have comforted myself.
53 Fiery anger has seized me because of the wicked,
Who forsake Thy law.
54 Thy statutes have been songs for me,
In my house of sojourning.

55 I remembered Thy name in the night, Jehovah,
And observed Thy law.
56 This good has been mine,
That I have kept Thy precepts.

This section has only one verse of petition, the others being mainly avowals of adherence to the Law in the face of various trials. The single petition (ver. 49) pleads the relation of servant, as giving a claim on the great Lord of the household, and adduces God's having encouraged hope as imposing on Him an obligation to fulfil it. Expectations fairly deduced from His word are prophets of their own realisation. In ver. 50, "This" points to the fact stated in *b*—namely, that the Word had already proved its power in the past by quickening the psalmist to new courage and hope—and declares that that remembered experience solaces his present sorrow. A heart that has been revived by life-giving contact with the Word has a hidden warmth beneath the deepest snows, and cleaves the more to that Word.

Vv. 51–53 describe the attitude of the lover of the Law in presence of the ungodly. He is as unmoved by shafts of ridicule as by the heavier artillery of slander and plots (ver. 23). To be laughed out of one's faith is even worse than to be terrified out of it. The lesson is not needless in a day when adherence and obedience to the Word are smiled at in so many quarters as indicating inferior intelligence. The psalmist held fast by it, and while laughter, with more than a trace of bitterness, rung about him, threw himself back on God's ancient and enduring words, which made the scoffs sound very hollow and transient (ver. 52). Righteous indignation, too, rises in a devout soul at sight of men's departure from God's law (ver. 53). The

word rendered "fiery anger" is found in xi. 6 ("a wind of *burning*"), and is best taken as above, though some would render *horror*. The wrath was not unmingled with compassion (ver. 136), and, whilst it is clearly an emotion belonging to the Old Testament rather than to the Christian type of devotion, it should be present, in softened form, in our feelings towards evil.

In ver. 54 the psalmist turns from gainsayers. He strikes again the note of ver. 19, calling earth his place of transitory abode, or, as we might say, his inn. The brevity of life would be crushing, if God had not spoken to us. Since He has, the pilgrims can march "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads," and all about their moving camp the sound of song may echo. To its lovers, God's law is not "harsh and crabbed . . . but musical as is Apollo's lute." This psalm is one of the poet's songs. Even those of us who are not singers can and should meditate on God's law, till its melodious beauty is disclosed and its commandments, that sometimes sound stern, set themselves to rhythm and harmony. As God's words took bitterness out of the thought of mortality, so His name remembered in the night brought light into darkness, whether physical or other. We often lose our memory of God and our hold of His hand when in sorrow, and grief sometimes thinks that it has a dispensation from obedience. So we shall be the better for remembering the psalmist's experience, and should, like him, cling to the Name in the dark, and then we shall have light enough to "observe Thy law." Ver. 56 looks back on the mingled life of good and evil, of which some of the sorrows have just been touched, and speaks deep contentment with its portion. Whatever else is withheld or withdrawn, that lot is blessed which has been helped by God to keep His

precepts, and they are happy and wise who deliberately prefer that good to all beside.

§ ח

57 My portion is Jehovah,
I have said that I would observe Thy words.
58 I have sought Thy favour with my whole heart,
Be merciful to me according to Thy promise.
59 I have thought on my ways,
And turned my feet to Thy testimonies.
60 I hasted and delayed not
To observe Thy commandments.
61 The cords of the wicked have enwrapped me,
Thy law have I not forgotten.
62 At midnight will I rise to thank Thee,
Because of Thy righteous judgments.
63 A companion am I of all who fear Thee,
And of those who observe Thy precepts.
64 Of Thy lovingkindness, Jehovah, the earth is full,
Thy statutes do Thou teach me.

Ver. 57 goes to the root of the matter in setting forth the resolve of obedience as the result of the consciousness of possessing God. He who feels, in his own happy heart, that Jehovah is his portion will be moved thereby to vow to keep His words. This psalmist had learned the evangelical lesson that he did not win God by keeping the Law, but that he was moved to keep the Law because he had won God; and he had also learned the companion truth, that the way to retain that possession is obedience.

Ver. 58 corresponds in some measure to ver. 57, but the order of clauses is inverted, *a* stating the psalmist's prayer, as ver. 57 *b* did his resolve, and *b* building on his cry the hope that God would be truly his portion and bestow His favour on him. But the true ground of our hope is not our most whole-hearted prayers, but God's promise. The following five verses change from

the key of petition into that of profession of obedience to, and delight in, the Law. The fruit of wise consideration of one's conduct is willing acceptance of God's law as His witness of what is right for us. The only "ways" which sober consideration will approve are those marked out in mercy by Him, and meditation on conduct is worthless if it does not issue in turning our feet into these. Without such meditation we shall wander on bye-ways and lose ourselves. Want of thought ruins men (ver. 59). But such turning of our feet to the right road has many foes, and chief among them is lingering delay. Therefore resolve must never be let cool, but be swiftly carried into action (ver. 60). The world is full of snares, and they lie thick round our feet whenever these are turned towards God's ways. The only means of keeping clear of them is to fix heart and mind on God's law. Then we shall be able to pick our steps among traps and pits (ver. 61). Physical weariness limits obedience, and needful sleep relaxes nervous tension, so that many a strenuous worker and noble aspirant falls beneath his daylight self in wakeful night seasons. Blessed they who in the night see visions of God and meditate on His law, not on earthly vanities or aims (ver. 62). Society has its temptations as solitude has. The man whose heart has fed in secret on God and His law will naturally gravitate towards like-minded people. Our relation to God and His uttered will should determine our affinities with men, and it is a bad sign when natural impulses do not draw us to those who fear God. Two men who have that fear in common are liker each other in their deepest selves, however different they may be in other respects, than either of them is to those to whom he is likest in surface characteristics and unlike in this

supreme trait (ver. 63). One pathetic petition closes the section. In ver. 19 the psalmist had based his prayer for illumination on his being a stranger on earth; here he grounds it on the plenitude of God's loving-kindness, which floods the world. It is the same plea in another form. All creatures bask in the light of God's love, which falls on each in a manner appropriate to its needs. Man's supreme need is the knowledge of God's statutes; therefore, the same all-embracing Mercy, which cares for these happy, careless creatures, will not be implored in vain, to satisfy his nobler and more pressing want. All beings get their respective boons unasked; but the pre-eminence of ours is partly seen in this, that it cannot be given without the co-operation of our desire. It will be given wherever that condition is fulfilled (ver. 64).

§ ט

65 Good hast Thou done with Thy servant,
Jehovah, according to Thy word.
66 Good judgment and knowledge teach me,
For I have believed Thy commandments.
67 Before I was afflicted, I went astray,
But now have I observed Thy saying.
68 Good art Thou and doing good,
Teach me Thy statutes.
69 The proud have trumped up a lie against me,
I, I with all [my] heart will keep Thy precepts.
70 Gross as fat is their heart,
I, I delight in Thy law.
71 Good for me was it that I was afflicted,
That I might learn Thy statutes.
72 Good for me is the law of Thy mouth,
Above thousands of gold and silver.

The restrictions of the acrostic structure are very obvious in this section, five of the eight verses of which begin with "Good." The epithet is first applied in

ver. 65 to the whole of God's dealings with the psalmist. To the devout soul all life is of one piece, and its submission and faith exercise transmuting power on pains and sorrows, so that the psalmist can say—

> "Let one more attest,
> I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime,
> And all was for best."

The epithet is next applied (ver. 66) to the perception (lit. taste) or faculty of discernment of good and evil, for which the psalmist prays, basing his petition on his belief of God's word. Swift, sure, and delicate apprehension of right and wrong comes from such belief. The heart in which it reigns is sensitive as a goldsmith's scales or a thermometer which visibly sinks when a cloud passes before the sun. The instincts of faith work surely and rapidly. The settled judgment that life had been good includes apparent evil (ver. 67), which is real evil in so far as it pains, but is, in a deeper view, good, inasmuch as it scourges a wandering heart back to true obedience and therefore to well-being. The words of ver. 67 are specially appropriate as the utterance of the Israel purified from idolatrous tendencies by captivity, but may also be the expression of individual experience. The epithet is next applied to God Himself (ver. 68). How steadfast a gaze into the depths of the Divine nature and over the broad field of the Divine activity is in that short, all-including clause, containing but three words in the Hebrew, "Good art Thou and doing good"! The prayer built on it is the one which continually recurs in this psalm, and is reached by many paths. Every view of man's condition, whether it is bright or dark, and every thought of God, bring the psalmist to the same desire. Here

God's character and beneficence, widespread and continual, prompt to the prayer, both because the knowledge of His will is our highest good, and because a good God cannot but wish His servants to be like Himself, in loving righteousness and hating iniquity.

Vv. 69 and 70 are a pair, setting forth the antithesis, frequent in the psalm, between evil men's conduct to the psalmist and his tranquil contemplation of, and delight in, God's precepts. False slanders buzz about him, but he cleaves to God's Law, and is conscious of innocence. Men are dull and insensible, as if their hearts were waterproofed with a layer of grease, through which no gentle rain from heaven could steal; but the psalmist is all the more led to open his heart to the gracious influences of that law, because others close theirs. If a bad man is not made worse by surrounding evil, he is made better by it.

Just as in vv. 65 and 68 the same thought of God's goodness is expressed, ver. 71 repeats the thought of ver. 67, with a slight deepening. There the beneficent influence of sorrow was simply declared as a fact; here it is thankfully accepted, with full submission and consent of the will. "Good for me" means not only good in fact, but *in my estimate.* The repetition of the phrase at the beginning of the next verse throws light on its meaning in ver. 71. The singer thinks that he has two real goods, pre-eminent among the uniform sequence of such, and these are, first, his sorrows, which he reckons to be blessings, because they have helped him to a firmer grasp of the other, the real good for every man, the Law which is sacred and venerable, because it has come from the very lips of Deity. That is our true wealth. Happy they whose estimate of it corresponds to its real worth, and who

have learned, by affliction or anyhow, that material riches are dross, compared with its solid preciousness!

§ י

73 Thy hands have made me and fashioned me,
Give me understanding that I may learn Thy commandments.
74 Let those who fear Thee see me and rejoice,
For I have waited for Thy word.
75 I know, Jehovah, that Thy judgments are in righteousness,
And that [in] faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me.
76 Oh let Thy lovingkindness be [sent] to comfort me,
According to Thy promise to Thy servant.
77 Let Thy compassions come to me that I may live,
For Thy law is my delight.
78 Let the proud be shamed, for they have lyingly dealt perversely with me;
I, I meditate on Thy precepts.
79 Let those who fear Thee turn to me,
And they shall know Thy testimonies.
80 Let my heart be sound in Thy statutes,
That I be not shamed.

Prayer for illumination is confined to the first and last verses of this section, the rest of which is mainly occupied with petitions for gracious providences, based upon the grounds of the psalmist's love of the Law, and of the encouragement to others to trust, derivable from his experience. Ver. 73 puts forcibly the thought that man is evidently an incomplete fragment, unless the gift of understanding is infused into his material frame. God has begun by shaping it, and therefore is pledged to go on to bestow spiritual discernment, when His creature asks it. But that prayer will only be answered if the suppliant intends to use the gift for its right purpose of learning God's statutes. Ver. 74 prays that the psalmist may be a witness that hope in His word is never vain, and so that his deliverances may be occasions of widespread gladness. God's honour is involved in answering His servant's trust.

Vv. 75-77 are linked together. "Judgments" (ver. 75) seem to mean here providential acts, not, as generally in this psalm, the Law. The acknowledgment of the justice and faithfulness which send sorrows precedes the two verses of petition for "lovingkindness" and "compassions." Sorrows still sting and burn, though recognised as sent in love, and the tried heart yearns for these other messengers to come from God to sustain and soothe. God's promise and the psalmist's delight in God's law are the double ground of the twin petitions. Then follow three verses which are discernibly connected, as expressing desires in regard to "the proud," the devout, and the psalmist himself. He prays that the first may be shamed—*i.e.*, that their deceitful or causeless hostility may be balked—and, as in several other verses, contrasts his own peaceful absorption in the Law with their machinations. He repeats the prayer of ver. 74 with a slight difference, asking that his deliverance may draw attention to him, and that others may, from contemplating his security, come to know the worth of God's testimonies. In ver. 79*b* the text reads "they shall know" (as the result of observing the psalmist), which the Hebrew margin needlessly alters into "those who know." For himself he prays that his heart may be sound, or thoroughly devoted to keep the law, and then he is sure that nothing shall ever put him to shame. "Who is he who will harm you, if ye be zealous for that which is good?"

§ כ

81 My soul has pined for Thy salvation,
For Thy word have I waited.
82 My eyes have pined for Thy promise,
Saying, When wilt Thou comfort me?

83 For I am become like a wine-skin in the smoke;
Thy statutes have I not forgotten.
84 How many are the days of Thy servant?
When wilt Thou execute judgment on my persecutors?
85 The proud have digged pits for me,
—They who are not according to Thy law.
86 All Thy commandments are faithfulness,
Lyingly they persecute me, help Thou me.
87 They had all but made an end of me on earth,
But I, I have not forgotten Thy precepts.
88 According to Thy lovingkindness revive me,
And I will observe the testimonies of Thy mouth.

This section has more than usual continuity. The psalmist is persecuted, and in these eight verses pours out his heart to God. Taken as a whole, they make a lovely picture of patient endurance and submissive longing. Intense and protracted yearning for deliverance has wasted his very soul, but has not merged in impatience or unbelief, for he has "waited for Thy word." His eyes have ached with straining for the signs of approaching comfort, the coming of which he has not doubted, but the delay of which has tried his faith. This longing has been quickened by troubles, which have wrapped him round like pungent smoke-wreaths eddying among the rafters, where disused wine-skins hang and get blackened and wrinkled. So has it been with him, but, through all, he has kept hold of God's statutes. So he plaintively reminds God of the brevity of his life, which has so short a tale of days that judgment on his persecutors must be swift, if it is to be of use. Vv. 85-87 describe the busy hostility of his foes. It is truculently contrary to God's law, and therefore, as is implied, worthy of God's counter-working. Ver. 85 *b* is best taken as a further description of the "proud," which is spread before God as a reason for His judicial action. The antithesis in

ver. 86, between the "faithfulness" of the Law and the "lying" persecutors, is the ground of the prayer, "Help Thou me." Even in extremest peril, when he was all but made away with, the psalmist still clung to God's precepts (ver. 87), and therefore he is heartened to pray for reviving, and to vow that then, bound by new chains of gratitude, he will, more than ever, observe God's testimonies. The measure of the new wine poured into the shrivelled wine-skin is nothing less than the measureless lovingkindness of God; and nothing but experience of His benefits melts to obedience.

§ ל

89 For ever, Jehovah,
Thy word is set fast in the heavens.
90 To generation after generation lasts Thy faithfulness,
Thou hast established the earth, and it stands firm.
91 According to Thy ordinances they stand firm to-day,
For all [things] are Thy servants.
92 Unless Thy law had been my delight,
Then had I perished in my affliction.
93 Never will I forget Thy precepts,
For with them Thou hast revived me.
94 To Thee do I belong, save me,
For Thy precepts have I sought.
95 For me have the wicked waited to destroy me,
Thy testimonies will I consider.
96 To all perfection have I seen a limit,
Thy commandment is exceeding broad.

The stability of nature witnesses to the steadfastness of the Word which sustains it. The Universe began and continues, because God puts forth His will. The heavens with their pure depths would collapse, and all their stars would flicker into darkness, if that uttered Will did not echo through their overwhelming spaces. The solid earth would not be solid, but for God's

power immanent in it. Heaven and earth are thus His servants. Ver. 91 *a* may possibly picture them as standing waiting "*for* Thine ordinances," but the indefinite preposition is probably better regarded as equivalent to *In accordance with.* The psalmist has reached the grand conceptions of the universal reign of God's law, and of the continuous forth-putting of God's will as the sustaining energy of all things. He seeks to link himself to that great band of God's servants, to be in harmony with stars and storms, with earth and ocean, as their fellow-servant; but yet he feels that his relation to God's law is closer than theirs, for he can delight in that which they unconsciously obey. Such delight in God's uttered will changes affliction from a foe, threatening life, to a friend, ministering strength (ver. 92). Nor does that Law when loved only avert destruction; it also increases vital power (ver. 93) and re-invigorates the better self. There is a sense in which the law *can* give life (Gal. iii. 21), but it must be welcomed and enshrined in the heart, in order to do so. The frequently recurring prayer for "salvation" has a double plea in ver. 94. The soul that has yielded itself to God in joyful obedience thereby establishes a claim on Him. He cannot but protect His own possession. Ownership has its obligations, which He recognises. The second plea is drawn from the psalmist's seeking after God's precepts, without which seeking there would be no reality in his profession of being God's. To seek them is the sure way to find both them and salvation (ver. 94). Whom God saves, enemies will vainly try to destroy, and, while they lurk in waiting to spring on the psalmist, his eyes are directed, not towards them, but to God's testimonies. To give heed to these is the sure way

to escape snares (ver. 95). Lifelong experience has taught the psalmist that there is a flaw in every human excellence, a limit soon reached and never passed to all that is noblest in man; but high above all achievements, and stretching beyond present vision, is the fair ideal bodied forth in the Law. Since it is God's commandment, it will not always be an unreached ideal, but may be indefinitely approximated to; and to contemplate it will be joy, when we learn that it is prophecy because it is commandment.

§ מ

97 How I love Thy law!
All the day is it my meditation.
98 Wiser than my enemies do Thy commandments make me,
For they are mine for ever.
99 More than all my teachers am I prudent,
For Thy testimonies are my meditation.
100 More than the aged do I understand,
For Thy precepts have I kept.
101 From every evil path have I held back my feet,
That I might observe Thy word.
102 From Thy judgments have I not departed,
For Thou, Thou hast instructed me.
103 How sweet are Thy promises to my palate,
More than honey to my mouth!
104 By Thy precepts I have understanding,
Therefore I hate every path of falsehood.

One thought pervades this section, that the Law is the fountain of sweetest wisdom. The rapture of love with which it opens is sustained throughout. The psalmist knows that he has not merely more wisdom of the same sort as his enemies, his teachers, and the aged have, but wisdom of a better kind. His foes were wise in craft, and his teachers drew their instructions from earthly springs, and the elders had learned that bitter,

worldly wisdom, which has been disillusioned of youth's unsuspectingness and dreams, without being thereby led to grasp that which is no illusion. But a heart which simply keeps to the Law reaches, in its simplicity, a higher truth than these know, and has instinctive discernment of good and evil. Worldly wisdom is transient. "Whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away," but the wisdom that comes with the commandment is enduring as it (ver. 98). Meditation must be accompanied with practice, in order to make the true wisdom one's own. The depths of the testimonies must be sounded by patient brooding on them, and then the knowledge thus won must be carried into act. To do what we know is the sure way to know it better, and to know more (vv. 99, 100). And that positive obedience has to be accompanied by abstinence from evil ways; for in such a world as this "Thou shalt not" is the necessary preliminary to "Thou shalt." The psalmist has a better teacher than those whom he has outgrown, even God Himself, and His instruction has a graciously constraining power, which keeps its conscious scholars in the right path (ver. 102). These thoughts draw another exclamation from the poet, who feels, as he reflects on his blessings, that the law beloved ceases to be harsh and is delightsome as well as healthgiving. It is promise as well as law, for God will help us to be what He commands us to be. They who love the Lawgiver find sweetness in the law (ver. 103). And this is the blessed effect of the wisdom which it gives, that it makes us quick to detect sophistries which tempt into forbidden paths, and fills us with wholesome detestation of these (ver. 104).

§ ɔ

105 A lamp to my foot is Thy word,
And a light to my path.
106 I have sworn, and have fulfilled it,
To observe Thy righteous judgments.
107 I am afflicted exceedingly,
Jehovah, revive me according to Thy word.
108 The free-will offerings of my mouth accept, I pray Thee, Jehovah,
And teach me Thy judgments.
109 My soul is continually in my hand,
But Thy law I do not forget.
110 The wicked have laid a snare for me,
Yet from Thy precepts I do not stray.
111 Thy testimonies have I taken as my heritage for ever,
For the joy of my heart are they.
112 I have inclined my heart to perform Thy statutes,
For ever, [to the] end.

A lamp is for night; light shines in the day. The Word is both, to the psalmist. His antithesis may be equivalent to a comprehensive declaration that the Law is light of every sort, or it may intend to lay stress on the varying phases of experience, and turn our thoughts to that Word which will gleam guidance in darkness, and shine, a better sun, on bright hours. The psalmist's choice, not merely the inherent power of the Law, is expressed in ver. 105. He has taken it for his guide, or, as ver. 106 says, has sworn and kept his oath, that he would observe the righteous decisions, which would point to his foot the true path. The affliction bemoaned in ver. 107 is probably the direct result of the conduct professed in ver. 106. The prayer for reviving, which means deliverance from outward evils rather than spiritual quickening, is, therefore, presented with confidence, and based upon the many promises in the Word of help to sufferers for righteousness. Whatever our afflictions, there is ease in telling God of them, and if

our desires for His help are "according to Thy word," they will be as willing to accept help to bear as help which removes the sorrow, and thus will not be offered unanswered. That cry for reviving is best understood as being "the free-will offerings" which the psalmist prays may be accepted. Happy in their afflictions are they whose chief desire even then is to learn more of God's statutes! They will find that their sorrows are their best teachers. If we wish most to make advances in His school, we shall not complain of the guides to whom He commits us. Continual alarms and dangers tend to foster disregard of Duty, as truly as does the opposite state of unbroken security. A man absorbed in keeping himself alive is apt to think he has no attention to spare for God's law (ver. 109), and one ringed about by traps is apt to take a circuit to avoid them, even at the cost of divergence from the path marked out by God (ver. 110). But, even in such circumstances, the psalmist did what all good men have to do, deliberately chose his portion, and found God's law better than any outward good, as being able to diffuse deep, sacred, and perpetual joy through all his inner nature. The heart thus filled with serene gladness is thereby drawn to perform God's statutes with lifelong persistency, and the heart thus inclined to obedience has tapped the sources of equally enduring joy.

§ D

113 The double-minded I hate,
But Thy law I love.
114 My shelter and my shield art Thou,
For Thy word have I waited.
115 Depart from me, ye evil-doers,
That I may keep the commandments of my God.
116 Uphold me according to Thy promise that I may live,
And let me not be ashamed of my hope.

117 Hold me up and I shall be saved,
And have regard to Thy statutes continually.
118 Thou makest light of all those who stray from Thy statutes,
For their deceit is a lie.
119 [Like] dross Thou hast cast aside all the wicked of the earth,
Therefore I love Thy testimonies.
120 My flesh creeps for fear of Thee,
And of Thy judgments I am afraid.

This section is mainly the expression of firm resolve to cleave to the Law. Continuity may be traced in it, since vv. 113–115 breathe love and determination, which pass in vv. 116, 117, into prayer, in view of the psalmist's weakness and the strength of temptation, while in vv. 118–120 the fate of the despisers of the Law intensifies the psalmist's clinging grasp of awe-struck love. Hatred of "double-minded" who waver between God and idols, and are weak accordingly, rests upon, and in its turn increases, whole-hearted adherence to the Law.

It is a tepid devotion to it which does not strongly recoil from lives that water down its precepts and try to walk on both sides of the way at once. Whoever has taken God for his defence can afford to bide God's time for fulfilment of His promises (ver. 114). And the natural results of such love to, and waiting for, His word are resolved separation from the society of those whose lives are moulded on opposite principles, and the ordering of external relations in accordance with the supreme purpose of keeping the commandments of Him whom love and waiting claim as "my God" (ver. 115). But resolves melt in the fire of temptation, and the psalmist knows life and himself too well to trust himself. So he betakes himself to prayer for God's upholding, without which he cannot live. A hope built on God's promise has a claim on Him, and its being put to shame in disappointment would be dishonour to God (ver. 116).

The psalmist knows that his wavering will can only be fixed by God, and that experience of His sustaining hand will make a stronger bond between God and him than anything besides. The consciousness of salvation must precede steadfast regard to the precepts of the God who saves (ver. 117). To stray from the Law is ruin, as is described in vv. 118, 119. They who wander are despised or made light of, "for their deceit is a lie" —*i.e.*, the hopes and plans with which they deceive themselves are false. It is a gnarled way of saying that all godless life is a blunder as well as a sin, and is fed with unrealisable promises. Dross is flung away when the metal is extracted. Slag from a furnace is hopelessly useless, and this psalmist thinks that the wicked of the earth are "thrown as rubbish to the void." He is not contemplating a future life, but God's judgments as manifested here in providence, and his faith is assured that, even here, that process is visible. Therefore, gazing upon the fate of evil-doers, his flesh creeps and every particular hair stands on end (as the word means). His dread is full of love, and love is full of dread. Profoundly are the two emotions yoked together in vv. 119 *b* and 120 *b*, "I *love* Thy testimonies . . . of Thy judgments I am *afraid*."

§ ע

121 I have done judgment and righteousness,
Thou wilt not leave me to my oppressors.
122 Be surety for Thy servant for good,
Let not the proud oppress me.
123 My eyes pine for Thy salvation
And for Thy righteous promise.
124 Deal with Thy servant according to Thy lovingkindness,
And teach me Thy statutes.
125 Thy servant am I; give me understanding,
That I may know Thy testimonies.

126 It is time for Jehovah to work,
They have made void Thy law.
127 Therefore I love Thy commandments
More than gold and more than fine gold.
128 Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts to be right,
Every false way do I hate.

The thought of evil-doers tinges most of this section. It opens with a triplet of verses, occasioned by their oppressions of the psalmist, and closes with a triplet occasioned by their breaches of the Law. In the former, he is conscious that he has followed the "judgment" or law of God, and hence hopes that he will not be abandoned to his foes. The consciousness and the hope equally need limitation, to correspond with true estimates of ourselves and with facts; for there is no absolute fulfilment of the Law, and good men are often left to be footballs for bad ones. But in its depths the confidence is true. Precisely because he has it, the psalmist prays that it may be vindicated by facts. "Be surety for Thy servant"—a profound image, drawn from legal procedure, in which one man becomes security for another and makes good his deficiencies. Thus God will stand between the hunted man and his foes, undertaking for him. "Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me." How much the fulfilment in Christ has exceeded the desire of the psalmist! "The oppressors' wrong" had lasted long, and the singer's weary eyes had been strained in looking for the help which seemed to tarry (compare ver. 82), and that fainting gaze humbly appeals to God. Will He not end the wistful watching speedily? Vv. 124, 125, are a pair, the psalmist's relation of servant being adduced in both as the ground of his prayer for teaching. But they differ, in that the former verse lays stress on the consonance of such instruction with God's lovingkindness, and the

latter, on its congruity with the psalmist's position and character as His servant. God's best gift is the knowledge of His will, which He surely will not withhold from spirits willing to serve, if they only knew how. Vv. 126-128 are closely linked. The psalmist's personal wrongs melt into the wider thought of wickedness which does its little best to make void that sovereign, steadfast law. Delitzsch would render "It is time to work for Jehovah"; and the meaning thus obtained is a worthy one. But that given above is more in accordance with the context. It is bold—and would be audacious if a prayer did not underlie the statement—to undertake to determine when evil has reached such height as to demand God's punitive action. But, however slow we should be to prescribe to Him the when or the how of His intervention, we may learn from the psalmist's emphatic "Therefores," which stand co-ordinately at the beginnings of vv. 127, 128, that the more men make void the Law, the more should God's servants prize it, and the more should they bind its precepts on their moral judgment, and heartily loathe all paths which, specious as they may be, are "paths of falsehood," though all the world may avow that they are true.

§ ב

129 Wonderful are Thy testimonies,
Therefore my soul keeps them.
130 The opening of Thy words gives light,
It gives understanding to the simple.
131 My mouth did I open wide, and panted,
For I longed for Thy commandments.
132 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
According to the right of those who love Thy name.
133 Establish my steps by Thy promise,
And let not iniquity lord it over me.
134 Redeem me from the oppression of men,
That I may observe Thy precepts.

135 Cause Thy face to shine upon Thy servant,
And teach me Thy statutes.
136 My eyes run down [in] streamlets of water,
Because men observe not Thy law.

Devout souls do not take offence at the depths and difficulties of God's word, but are thereby drawn to intenser contemplation of them. We weary of the Trivial and Obvious. That which tasks and outstrips our powers attracts. But the obscurity must not be arbitrary, but inherent, a clear obscure, like the depths of a pure sea. These wonderful testimonies give light, notwithstanding, or rather because of, their wonderfulness, and it is the simple heart, not the sharpened intellect, that penetrates furthest into them and finds light most surely (ver. 130). Therefore the psalmist longs for God's commandments, like a wild creature panting open-mouthed for water. He puts to shame our indifference. If his longing was not excessive, how defective is ours! Ver. 132, like ver. 122, has no distinct allusion to the Law, though the word rendered in it "right" is that used in the psalm for the Law considered as "judgments." The prayer is a bold one, pleading what is justly due to the lovers of God's name. Kay appropriately quotes "God is not *unrighteous* to forget your work and labour of *love*, which ye have showed towards His *name*" (Heb. vi. 10). One would have expected "Law" instead of "name" in the last word of the verse, and possibly the conception of Law may be, as it were, latent in "name," for the latter does carry in it imperative commandments and plain revelations of duty. God's Name holds the Law in germ. The Law is but the expansion of the meaning of the Name. "Promise" in ver. 133 (lit. saying) must be taken in a widened sense, as including all God's

revealed will. The only escape from the tyranny of sin is to have our steps established by God's word, and His help is needed for such establishment. Rebellion against sin's dominion is already victory over it, if the rebel summons God's heavenly reinforcements to his help. It is a high attainment to desire deliverance from men, chiefly in order to observe, unhindered, God's commandments (ver. 134). And it is as high a desire to seek the light of God's face mainly as the means of seeing His will more clearly. The psalmist did not merely wish for outward prosperity or inward cheer and comfort, but that these might contribute to fulfilling his deepest wish of learning better what God would have him to do (ver. 135). The moods of indignation (ver. 53) and of hatred (vv. 104, 113, 128) have given place to softer emotions, as they ever should (ver. 136). Tears and dewy pity should mingle with righteous anger, as when Jesus "looked round about on them with anger, being with the anger grieved at the hardening of their heart" (Mark iii. 5).

§ ץ

137 Righteous art Thou, Jehovah,
And upright are Thy judgments.
138 In righteousness Thou hast commanded Thy testimonies,
And in exceeding faithfulness.
139 My zeal has consumed me,
For my adversaries have forgotten Thy words.
140 Well tried by fire is Thy promise,
And Thy servant loves it.
141 Small and despised am I,
Thy precepts have I not forgotten.
142 Thy righteousness is righteousness for ever,
And Thy law is truth.
143 Distress and anguish have found me,
Thy commandments are my delight.
144 Righteousness for ever are Thy testimonies,
Give me understanding that I may live.

The first word suggested to the psalmist under this letter is Righteousness. That august conception was grasped by devout Israelites with a tenacity, and assumed a prominence in their thoughts, unparalleled elsewhere. It is no mere yielding to the requirements of the acrostic scheme which sets that great word in four of the eight verses of this section (137, 138, 142, 144). Two thoughts are common to them all, that Righteousness has its seat in the bosom of God, and that the Law is a true transcript of that Divine righteousness. These things being so, it follows that the Law is given to men in accordance with the Divine "faithfulness"—*i.e.*, in remembrance and discharge of the obligations which God has undertaken towards them. Nor less certainly does it follow that that Law, which is the "eradiation" of God's righteousness, is eternal as its fontal source (vv. 142, 144). The beam must last as long as the sun. No doubt, there are transient elements in the Law which the psalmist loved, but its essence is everlasting, because its origin is God's everlasting Righteousness. So absorbed is he in adoring contemplation of it, that he even forgets to pray for help to keep it, and not till ver. 144 does he ask for understanding that he may live. True life is in the knowledge of the Law by which God is known, as Jesus has taught us that to know the only true God is life eternal. A faint gleam of immortal hope perhaps shines in that prayer, for if the "testimonies" are for ever, and the knowledge of them is life, it cannot be that they shall outlast the soul that knows and lives by them. One more characteristic of God's righteous testimonies is celebrated in ver. 140—namely, that they have stood sharp tests, and, like metal in the furnace, have not been dissolved but brightened by the heat.

They have been tested, when the psalmist was afflicted and found them to hold true. The same fire tried him and them, and he does not glorify his own endurance, but the promise which enabled him to stand firm. The remaining verses of the section describe the psalmist's afflictions and clinging to the Law. Ver. 139 recurs to his emotions on seeing men's neglect of it. "Zeal" here takes the place of grief (ver. 136) and of indignation and hatred. Friction against widespread godlessness generates a flame of zeal, as it should always do. "Small and despised" was Israel among the great powers of the ancient world, but he who meditates on the Law is armed against contempt and contented in insignificance (ver. 141). "Distress and anguish" may surround him, but hidden springs of "delight" well up in the heart that cleaves to the Law, like outbursts of fresh water rising to the surface of a salt sea (ver. 144).

§ p

145 I have called with my whole heart; answer me, Jehovah;
Thy statutes will I keep.
146 I have called unto Thee, save me,
And I will observe Thy testimonies.
147 I anticipated the morning twilight and cried aloud,
For Thy word I waited.
148 My eyes anticipated the night watches,
That I might meditate on Thy promise.
149 Hear my voice according to Thy lovingkindness,
Jehovah, according to Thy judgments revive me.
150 They draw near who follow after mischief,
From Thy law they are far off.
151 Near art Thou, Jehovah,
And all Thy commandments are truth.
152 Long ago have I known from Thy testimonies,
That Thou hast founded them for ever.

The first two verses are a pair, in which former prayers

for deliverance and vows of obedience are recalled and repeated. The tone of supplication prevails through the section. The cries now presented are no new things. The psalmist's habit has been prayer, whole-hearted, continued, and accompanied with the resolve to keep by obedience and to observe with sharpened watchfulness the utterances of God's will. Another pair of verses follows (vv. 147, 148), which recall the singer's wakeful devotion. His voice rose to God ere the dim morning broke, and his heart kept itself in submissive expectance. His eyes saw God's promises shining in the nightly darkness, and making meditation better than sleep. The petitions in ver. 149 may be taken as based upon the preceding pairs. The psalmist's patient continuance gives him ground to expect an answer. But the true ground is God's character, as witnessed by His deeds of loving-kindness and His revelation of His "judgments" in the Law.

Another pair of verses follows (vv. 150, 151), in which the hostile nearness of the psalmist's foes, gathering round him with malignant purpose, is significantly contrasted, both with their remoteness in temper from the character enjoined in the Law, and with the yet closer proximity of the assailed man's defender. He who has God near him, and who realises that His "commandments are truth," can look untrembling on mustering masses of enemies. This singer had learned that before danger threatened. The last verse of the section breathes the same tone of long-continued and habitual acquaintance with God and His Law as the earlier pairs of verses do. The convictions of a life-time were too deeply rooted to be disturbed by such a passing storm. There is, as it were, a calm smile of

triumphant certitude in that "Long ago." Experience teaches that the foundation, laid for trust as well as for conduct in the Law, is too stable to be moved, and that we need not fear to build our all on it. Let us build rock on that rock, and answer God's everlasting testimonies with our unwavering reliance and submission.

§ ר

153 See my affliction, and deliver me,
For Thy law do I not forget.
154 Plead my plea and redeem me,
Revive me according to Thy promise.
155 Far from the wicked is salvation,
For they seek not Thy statutes.
156 Thy compassions are many, Jehovah,
According to Thy judgments revive me.
157 Many are my pursuers and my adversaries,
From Thy testimonies I have not declined.
158 I beheld the faithless and loathed [them]
Because they observed not Thy promise.
159 See how I love Thy precepts,
Jehovah, according to Thy lovingkindness revive me.
160 The sum of Thy word is truth,
And every one of Thy righteous judgments endures for ever.

The prayer "revive me" occurs thrice in this section. It is not a petition for spiritual quickening so much as for removal of calamities, which restrained free, joyous life. Its repetition accords with other characteristics of this section, which is markedly a cry from a burdened heart. The psalmist is in affliction; he is, as it were, the defendant in a suit, a captive needing a strong avenger (ver. 154), compassed about by a swarm of enemies (ver. 157), forced to endure the sight of the faithless and to recoil from them (ver. 158). His thoughts vibrate between his needs and God's compassions, between his own cleaving to the Law and its grand comprehensiveness and perpetuity. His

prayer now is not for fuller knowledge of the Law, but for rescue from his troubles. It is worth while to follow his swift turns of thought, which, in their windings, are shaped by the double sense of need and of Divine fulness. First come two plaintive cries for rescue, based in one case on his adherence to the Law, and in the other on God's promise. Then his eye turns on those who do not, like him, seek God's statutes, and these he pronounces, with solemn depth of insight, to be far from the salvation which he feels is his, because they have no desire to know God's will. That is a pregnant word. Swiftly he turns from these unhappy ones to gaze on the multitude of God's compassions, which hearten him to repeat his prayer for revival, according to God's "judgments"—*i.e.*, His decisions contained in the Law. But, again, his critical position among enemies forces itself into remembrance, and he can only plead that, in spite of them, he has held fast by the Law, and, when compelled to see apostates, has felt no temptation to join them, but a wholesome loathing of all departure from God's word. That loathing was the other side of his love. The more closely we cleave to God's precepts, the more shall we recoil from modes of thought and life which flout them. And then the psalmist looks wistfully up once more, and asks that his love may receive what God's loving-kindness emboldens it to look for as its result—namely, the reviving, which he thus once more craves. That love for the Law has led him into the depths of understanding God's Word, and so his lowly petitions swell into the declaration, which he has verified in life, that its sum-total is truth, and a perpetual possession for loving hearts, however ringed round by enemies and "weighed upon by sore distress."

§ ש

161 Princes have persecuted me without a cause,
But at Thy words my heart stands in awe.
162 I rejoice over Thy promise,
As one that finds great booty.
163 Lying I hate and abhor,
Thy law do I love.
164 Seven times a day I praise Thee,
Because of Thy righteous judgments.
165 Great peace have they that love Thy law,
And they have no stumbling-block.
166 I have hoped for Thy salvation, Jehovah,
And Thy commandments have I done.
167 My soul has observed Thy testimonies,
And I love them exceedingly.
168 I have observed Thy precepts and Thy testimonies,
For all my ways are before Thee.

The tone of this section is in striking contrast with that of the preceding. Here, with the exception of the first clause of the first verse, all is sunny, and the thunder-clouds are hull down on the horizon. Joy, peace, and hope breathe through the song. Beautifully are reverential awe and exuberant gladness blended as contemporaneous results of listening to God's word. There is rapture in that awe; there is awe in that bounding gladness. To possess that Law is better than to win rich booty. The spoils of the conflict, which we wage with our own negligence or disobedience, are our best wealth. The familiar connection between love of the Law and hatred of lives which depart from it, and are therefore lies and built on lies, re-appears, yet not as the ground of prayer for help, but as part of the blessed treasures which the psalmist is recounting. His life is accompanied by music of perpetual praise. Seven times a day—*i.e.*, unceasingly—his glad heart breaks into song, and "the o'ercome of his song" is ever God's righteous

judgments. His own experience gives assurance of the universal truth that the love of God's law secures peace, inasmuch as such love brings the heart into contact with absolute good, inasmuch as submission to God's will is always peace, inasmuch as the fountain of unrest is dried up, inasmuch as all outward things are allies of such a heart and serve the soul that serves God. Such love saves from falling over stumbling-blocks, and enables a man "to walk firmly and safely on the clear path of duty." Like the dying Jacob, such a man waits for God's salvation, patiently expecting that each day will bring its own form of help and deliverance, and his waiting is no idle anticipation, but full of strenuous obedience (ver. 166), and of watchful observance, such as the eyes of a servant direct to his master (ver. 167 *a*). Love makes such a man keen to note the slightest indications of God's will, and eager to obey them all (vv. 167 *b*., 168 *a*). All this joyous profession of the psalmist's happy experience he spreads humbly before God, appealing to Him whether it is true. He is not flaunting his self-righteousness in God's face, but gladly recounting to God's honour all the "spoil" that he has found, as he penetrated into the Law and it penetrated into his inmost being.

§ ת

169 Let my cry come near before Thy face, Jehovah,
According to Thy word give me understanding.
170 Let my supplication come before Thy face,
According to Thy promise deliver me.
171 My lips shall well forth praise,
For Thou teachest me Thy statutes.
172 My tongue shall sing of Thy promise,
For all Thy commandments are righteousness.
173 Let Thy hand be [stretched out] to help me,
For Thy precepts have I chosen.

174 I long for Thy salvation, Jehovah,
And Thy law is my delight.
175 Let my soul live and it shall praise Thee,
And let Thy judgments help me.
176 I have strayed like a lost sheep, seek Thy servant,
For Thy commandments do I not forget.

The threads that have run through the psalm are knotted firmly together in this closing section, which falls into four pairs of verses. In the first, the manifold preceding petitions are concentrated into two for understanding and deliverance, the twin needs of man, of which the one covers the whole ground of inward illumination, and the other comprises all good for outward life, while both are in accordance with the large confidence warranted by God's faithful words. Petition passes into praise. The psalmist instinctively obeys the command, "By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known." His lips give forth not only shrill cries of need, but well up songs of thanks; and, while a thousand mercies impel the sparkling flood of praise, the chief of these is God's teaching him His righteous statutes (vv. 171, 172). In the next pair of verses, the emphasis lies, not on the prayer for help, so much as on its grounds in the psalmist's deliberate choice of God's precepts, his patient yearning for God's salvation, and his delight in the Law, all of which characteristics have been over and over again professed in the psalm. Here, once more, they are massed together, not in self-righteousness, but as making it incredible that, God being the faithful and merciful God which He is, His hand should hang idle when His servant cries for help (vv. 173, 174). The final pair of verses sets forth the relations of the devout soul with God in their widest and most permanent forms. The true life of the soul

must come from Him, the Fountain of Life. A soul thus made to live by communion with, and derivation of life from, God lives to praise, and all its motions are worship. To it the Law is no menace nor unwelcome restriction but a helper. Life drawn from God, turned to God in continual praise, and invigorated by unfailing helps ministered through His uttered will, is the only life worth living. It is granted to all who ask for it. But a lower, sadder note must ever mingle in our prayers. Aspiration and trust must be intertwined with consciousness of weakness and distrust of one's self. Only those who are ignorant of the steps of the soul's pilgrimage to God can wonder that the psalmist's last thoughts about himself blend confession of wandering like a straying sheep, and profession of not forgetting God's commandments. Both phases of consciousness co-exist in the true servant of God, as, alas! both have grounds in his experience. But our sense of having wandered should ever be accompanied with the tender thought that the lost sheep *is* a sheep, beloved and sought for by the great Shepherd, in whose search, not in our own docile following of His footsteps, lies our firmest hope. The psalmist prayed "Seek Thy servant," for he knew how continually he would be tempted to stray. But we know better than he did how wonderfully the answer has surpassed his petition. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

PSALMS CXX.—CXXXIV.

THESE fifteen psalms form a short psalter within the Psalter, each having the same title (with a slight grammatical variation in Psalm cxxi.). Its meaning is very doubtful. Many of the older authorities understand it to signify "a song of steps," and explain it by a very uncertain tradition that these psalms were sung on fifteen steps leading from the court of the women to that of the men, each on one step. The R.V.'s rendering, "degrees," uses that word in this sense (like the Latin *gradus*). But though undoubtedly the word means steps, there is no sufficient support for the tradition in question; and, as Delitzsch well observes, if this were the meaning of the title, "it would be much more external than any of the other inscriptions to the Psalms."

Another explanation fixes on the literal meaning of the word—*i.e.*, "goings up"—and points to its use in the singular for the Return from Babylon (Ezra vii. 9), as supporting the view that these were psalms sung by the returning exiles. There is much in the group of songs to favour this view; but against it is the fact that Psalms cxxii. and cxxxiv. imply the existence of the Temple, and the fully organised ceremonial worship.

A third solution is that the name refers to the structure of these psalms, which have a "step-like, progressive rhythm." This is Gesenius' explanation,

adopted by Delitzsch. But the peculiar structure in question, though very obvious in several of these psalms, is scarcely perceptible in others, and is entirely absent from Psalm cxxxii.

The remaining explanation of the title is the most probable—that the "goings up" were those of the worshippers travelling to Jerusalem for the feasts. This little collection is, then, "The Song Book of the Pilgrims," a designation to which its contents well correspond.

PSALM CXX.

1 To Jehovah in my straits I cried,
And He answered me.

2 Jehovah, deliver my soul from the lying lip,
From the deceitful tongue.
3 What shall He give to thee, and what more
shall He give thee,
Deceitful tongue?.
4 Arrows of the Mighty, sharpened ones,
With coals of broom.

5 Woe is me that I sojourn in Meshech,
[That] I dwell beside the tents of Kedar!
6 Long has my soul had her dwelling
With him who hates peace.
7 I am—peace; but when I speak,
They are for war.

THE collection of pilgrim songs is appropriately introduced by one expressive of the unrest arising from compulsory association with uncongenial and hostile neighbours. The psalmist laments that his sensitive "soul" has been so long obliged to be a "sojourner" where he has heard nothing but lying and strife. Weary of these, his soul stretches her wings towards a land of rest. His feeling ill at ease amidst present surroundings stings him to take the pilgrim's staff. "In" this singer's "heart are the ways."

The simplicity of this little song scarcely admits of separation into parts; but one may note that an intro-

ductory verse is followed by two groups of three verses each,—the former of which is prayer for deliverance from the "deceitful tongue," and prediction that retribution will fall on it (vv. 2–4); while the latter bemoans the psalmist's uncongenial abode among enemies (vv. 5–7).

The verbs in ver. 1 are most naturally referred to former experiences of the power of prayer, which encourage renewed petition. Devout hearts argue that what Jehovah has done once He will do again. Since His mercy endureth for ever, He will not weary of bestowing, nor will former gifts exhaust His stores. Men say, "I have given so often that I can give no more"; God says, "I have given, therefore I will give." The psalmist was not in need of defence against armed foes, but against false tongues. But it is not plain whether these were slanderous, flattering, or untrustworthy in their promises of friendship. The allusions are too general to admit of certainty. At all events, he was surrounded by a choking atmosphere of falsehood, from which he longed to escape into purer air. Some commentators would refer the allusions to the circumstances of the exiles in Babylon; others to the slanders of the Samaritans and others who tried to hinder the rebuilding of the Temple; others think that his own hostile fellow-countrymen are the psalmist's foes. May we not rather hear in his plaint the voice of the devout heart, which ever painfully feels the dissonance between its deep yearnings and the Babel of vain words which fills every place with jangling and deceit? To one who holds converse with God, there is nothing more appalling or more abhorrent than the flood of empty talk which drowns the world. If there was any specific foe in the psalmist's mind, he

has not described him so as to enable us to identify him.

Ver. 3 may be taken in several ways, according as "deceitful tongue" is taken as a vocative or as the nominative of the verb "give," and as that verb is taken in a good or a bad sense, and as "thee" is taken to refer to the tongue or to some unnamed person. It is unnecessary to enter here on a discussion of the widely divergent explanations given. They fall principally into two classes. One takes the words "deceitful tongue" as vocative, and regards the question as meaning, "What retribution shall God give to thee, O deceitful tongue?" while the other takes it as asking what the tongue shall give unto an unnamed person designated by "thee." That person is by some considered to be the owner of the tongue, who is asked what profit his falsehood will be to him; while others suppose the "thee" to mean Jehovah, and the question to be like that of Job (x. 3). Baethgen takes this view, and paraphrases, "What increase of Thy riches canst Thou expect therefrom, that Thou dost permit the godless to oppress the righteous?" Grammatically either class of explanation is warranted; and the reader's feeling of which is most appropriate must decide. The present writer inclines to the common interpretation, which takes ver. 3 as addressed to the deceitful tongue, in the sense, "What punishment shall God inflict upon thee?" Ver. 4 is the answer, describing the penal consequences of falsehood, as resembling the crimes which they avenge. Such a tongue is likened to sharp arrows and swords in Psalms lvii. 4, lxiv. 3, etc. The punishment shall be like the crime. For the sentiment compare Psalm cxl. 9, 10. It is not necessary to suppose that the "Mighty" is God, though such

a reference gives force to the words. "The tongue which shot piercing arrows is pierced by the sharpened arrows of an irresistibly strong One; it, which set its neighbour in a fever of anguish, must endure a lasting heat of broom-coals, which consumes it surely" (Delitzsch).

In the group of vv. 5–7, the psalmist bemoans his compulsory association with hostile companions, and longs to "flee away and be at rest." Meshech was the name of barbarous tribes who, in the times of Sargon and Sennacherib, inhabited the highlands to the east of Cilicia, and in later days retreated northwards to the neighbourhood of the Black Sea (Sayce, "Higher Criticism and Monuments," p. 130). Kedar was one of the Bedawin tribes of the Arabian desert. The long distance between the localities occupied by these two tribes requires an allegorical explanation of their names. They stand as types of barbarous and truculent foes—as we might say, Samoyeds and Patagonians. The psalmist's plaint struck on Cromwell's heart, and is echoed, with another explanation of its meaning which he had, no doubt, learned from some Puritan minister: "I live, you know where, in Meshech, which they say signifies prolonging; in Kedar, which signifies blackness; yet the Lord forsaketh me not" (Carlyle, "Letters and Speeches," i. 127: London, 1846). The peace-loving psalmist describes himself as stunned by the noise and quarrelsomeness of those around him. "I am—peace" (compare Psalm cix. 4). But his gentlest word is like a spark on tinder. If he but speaks, they fly to their weapons, and are ready without provocation to answer with blows.

So the psalm ends as with a long-drawn sigh. It inverts the usual order of similar psalms, in which the

description of need is wont to precede the prayer for deliverance. It thus sets forth most pathetically the sense of discordance between a man and his environment, which urges the soul that feels it to seek a better home. So this is a true pilgrim psalm.

PSALM CXXI.

1 I will lift mine eyes to the hills;
Whence cometh my help?
2 My help [comes] from Jehovah,
The Maker of heaven and earth.

3 May He not suffer thy feet to totter,
May thy Keeper not slumber!
4 Behold, thy Keeper slumbers not;
Behold, He slumbers not nor sleeps
[Who is] the Keeper of Israel.

5 Jehovah is thy Keeper,
Jehovah is thy shade on thy right hand.
6 By day the sun shall not smite thee,
Nor the moon by night.

7 Jehovah shall keep thee from all evil,
He shall keep thy soul.
8 Jehovah shall keep thy going out and thy coming in,
From now, even for evermore.

HOW many timid, anxious hearts has this sweet outpouring of quiet trust braced and lifted to its own serene height of conscious safety! This psalmist is so absorbed in the thought of his Keeper that he barely names his dangers. With happy assurance of protection, he says over and over again the one word which is his amulet against foes and fears. Six times in these few verses does the thought recur that Jehovah is the Keeper of Israel or of the single soul. The quietness that comes of confidence is the singer's

strength. Whether he is an exile, looking across the plains of Mesopotamia towards the blue hills, which the eye cannot discern, or a pilgrim catching the first sight of the mountain on which Jehovah sits enshrined, is a question which cannot be decisively answered; but the power and beauty of this little breathing of peaceful trust are but slightly affected by any hypothesis as to the singer's circumstances. Vv. 1 and 2 stand apart from the remainder, in so far as in them the psalmist speaks in the first person, while in the rest of the psalm he is spoken to in the second. But this does not necessarily involve the supposition of an antiphonal song. The two first verses may have been sung by a single voice, and the assurances of the following ones by a chorus or second singer. But it is quite as likely that, as in other psalms, the singer is in vv. 3–8 himself the speaker of the assurances which confirm his own faith.

His first words describe the earnest look of longing. He will lift his eyes from all the coil of troubles and perils to the heights. *Sursum corda* expresses the true ascent which these psalms enjoin and exemplify. If the supposition that the psalmist is an exile on the monotonous levels of Babylon is correct, one feels the pathetic beauty of his wistful gaze across the dreary flats towards the point where he knows that the hills of his father-land rise. To look beyond the low levels where we dwell, to the unseen heights where we have our home, is the condition of all noble living amid these lower ranges of engagement with the Visible and Transient. "Whence comes my help?" is a question which may be only put in order to make the assured answer more emphatic, but may also be an expression of momentary despondency, as the thought of the

distance between the gazer and the mountains chills his aspirations. "It is easy to look, but hard to journey thither. How shall I reach that goal? I am weak; the way is long and beset with foes." The loftier the ideal, the more needful, if it is ever to be reached, that our consciousness of its height and of our own feebleness should drive us to recognise our need of help in order to attain it.

Whoever has thus high longings sobered by lowly estimates of self is ready to receive the assurance of Divine aid. That sense of impotence is the precursor of faith. We must distrust ourselves, if we are ever to confide in God. To know that we need His aid is a condition of obtaining it. Bewildered despondency asks, "Whence comes my help?" and scans the low levels in vain. The eye that is lifted to the hills is sure to see Him coming to succour; for that question on the lips of one whose looks are directed thither is a prayer, rather than a question; and the assistance he needs sets out towards him from the throne, like a sunbeam from the sun, as soon as he looks up to the light.

The particle of negation in ver. 3 is not that used in ver. 4, but that which is employed in commands or wishes. The progress from subjective desire in ver. 3, to objective certainty of Divine help as expressed in ver. 4 and the remainder of the psalm, is best exhibited if the verbs in the former verse are translated as expressions of wish—"May He not," etc. Whether the speaker is taken to be the psalmist or another makes little difference to the force of ver. 3, which lays hold in supplication of the truth just uttered in ver. 2, and thereby gains a more assured certainty that it is true, as the following verses go on to declare. It is no drop to a lower mood to pass from assertion of God's help

to prayer for it. Rather it is the natural progress of faith. Both clauses of ver. 2 become specially significant if this is a song for pilgrims. Their daily march and their nightly encampment will then be placed under the care of Jehovah, who will hold up their feet unwearied on the road and watch unslumbering over their repose. But such a reference is not necessary. The language is quite general. It covers the whole ground of toil and rest, and prays for strength for the one and quiet security in the other.

The remainder of the psalm expands the one thought of Jehovah the Keeper, with sweet reiteration, and yet comprehensive variation. First, the thought of the last clause of the preceding verse is caught up again. Jehovah is the keeper of the community, over which He watches with unslumbering care. He keeps Israel, so long as Israel keeps His law; for the word so frequently used here is the same as is continually employed for observance of the commandments. He had seemed to slumber while Israel was in exile, and had been prayed to awake, in many a cry from the captives. Now they have learned that He never slumbers: His power is unwearied, and needs no recuperation; His watchfulness is never at fault. But universal as is His care, it does not overlook the single defenceless suppliant. He is "*thy* Keeper," and will stand at thy right hand, where helpers stand, to shield thee from all dangers. Men lose sight of the individual in the multitude, and the wider their benevolence or beneficence, the less it takes account of units; but God loves all because He loves each, and the aggregate is kept because each member of it is. The light which floods the universe gently illumines every eye. The two conceptions of defence and impartation of power

are smelted together in the pregnant phrase of ver. 5 *b*, "thy shade at thy right hand."

The notion of shelter from evils predominates in the remainder of the psalm. It is applied in ver. 6 to possible perils from physical causes: the fierce sunlight beat down on the pilgrim band, and the moon was believed, and apparently with correctness, to shed malignant influences on sleepers. The same antithesis of day and night, work and rest, which is found in ver. 3 appears again here. The promise is widened out in ver. 7 so as to be all-inclusive. "All evil" will be averted from him who has Jehovah for his keeper; therefore, if any so-called Evil comes, he may be sure that it is Good with a veil on. We should apply the assurances of the psalm to the interpretation of life, as well as take them for the antidote of fearful anticipations.

Equally comprehensive is the designation of that which is to be kept. It is "thy soul," the life or personal being. Whatever may be shorn away by the sharp shears of Loss, that will be safe; and if it is, nothing else matters very much. The individual soul is of large account in God's sight: He keeps it as a deposit entrusted to Him by faith. Much may go; but His hand closes round us when we commit ourselves into it, and none is able to pluck us thence.

In the final verse, the psalmist recurs to his favourite antithesis of external toil and repose in the home, the two halves of the pilgrim life for every man; and while thus, in the first clause of the verse, he includes all varieties of circumstance, in the second he looks on into a future of which he does not see the bounds, and triumphs over all possible foes that may lurk in its dim recesses, in the assurance that, however far it may

extend, and whatever strange conditions it may hide, the Keeper will be there, and all will be well. Whether or not he looked to the last "going out," our exodus from earth (Luke ix. 31; 2 Peter i. 15), or to that abundant entrance (2 Peter i. 11) into the true home which crowns the pilgrimage here, we cannot but read into his indefinite words their largest meaning, and rejoice that we have One who "is able to keep that which we have committed to Him against that day."

PSALM CXXII.

1 I rejoiced when they said to me,
To the house of Jehovah let us go.
2 Standing are our feet
In thy gates, Jerusalem.

3 Jerusalem that art built [again]
As a city that is compact together.
4 Whither went up the tribes, the tribes of Jah,
—[According to] the precept for Israel—
To give thanks to the name of Jehovah.
5 For there were set thrones of judgment,
Thrones for the house of David.

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;
Prosperous be they who love thee!
7 Be peace within thy bulwark,
Prosperity within thy palaces.
8 Because of my brethren and my companions' sake
Let me now wish thee peace.
9 Because of the house of Jehovah our God
Let me now seek thy good.

THIS is very distinctly a pilgrim psalm. But there is difficulty in determining the singer's precise point of view, arising from the possibility of understanding the phrase in ver. 2, "are standing," as meaning either "are" or "were standing" or "have stood." If it is taken as a present tense, the psalm begins by recalling the joy with which the pilgrims began their march, and in ver. 2 rejoices in reaching the goal. Then, in vv. 3, 4, 5 the psalmist paints the sight of

the city which gladdened the gazers' eyes, remembers ancient glories when Jerusalem was the rallying-point for united worship and the seat of the Davidic monarchy, and finally pours out patriotic exhortations to love Jerusalem and prayers for her peace and prosperity. This seems the most natural construing of the psalm. If, on the other hand, ver. 2 refers to a past time, "the poet, now again returning home or actually returned, remembers the whole pilgrimage from its beginning onwards." This is possible; but the warmth of emotion in the exclamation in ver. 3 is more appropriate to the moment of rapturous realisation of a long-sought joy than to the paler remembrance of it.

Taking, then, the former view of the verse, we have the beginning and end of the pilgrimage brought into juxtaposition in vv. 1 and 2. It was begun in joy; it ends in full attainment and a satisfied rapture, as the pilgrim finds the feet which have traversed many a weary mile planted at last within the city. How fading the annoyances of the road! Happy they whose life's path ends where the psalmist's did! The joy of fruition will surpass that of anticipation, and difficulties and dangers will be forgotten.

Vv. 3–5 give voice to the crowding thoughts and memories waked by that moment of supreme joy, when dreams and hopes have become realities, and the pilgrim's happy eyes do actually see the city. It stands "built," by which is best understood *built anew*, rising from the ruins of many years. It is "compact together," the former breaches in the walls and the melancholy gaps in the buildings being filled up. Others take the reference to be to the crowding of its houses, which its site, a narrow peninsula of rock with deep ravines on three sides, made necessary. But

fair to his eyes as the Jerusalem of to-day looked, the poet-patriot sees auguster forms rising behind it, and recalls vanished glories, when all the twelve tribes came up to worship, according to the commandment, and there was yet a king in Israel. The religious and civil life of the nation had their centres in the city; and Jerusalem had become the seat of worship because it was the seat of the monarchy. These days were past; but though few in number, the tribes still were going up; and the psalmist does not feel the sadness but the sanctity of the vanished past.

Thus moved to the depths of his soul, he breaks forth into exhortation to his companion pilgrims to pray for the peace of the city. There is a play on the meaning of the name in ver. 6*a*; for, as the Tel-el-Amarna tablets have told us, the name of the city of the priest-king was Uru Salim—the city of [the god of] peace. The prayer is that the *nomen* may become *omen*, and that the hope that moved in the hearts that had so long ago and in the midst of wars given so fair a designation to their abode, may be fulfilled now at last. A similar play of words lies in the interchange of "peace" and "prosperity," which are closely similar in sound in the Hebrew. So sure is the psalmist that God will favour Zion, that he assures his companions that individual well-being will be secured by loyal love to her. The motive appealed to may be so put as to be mere selfishness, though, if any man loved Zion not for Zion's sake but for his own, he could scarcely be deemed to love her at all. But rightly understood, the psalmist proclaims an everlasting truth, that the highest good is realised by sinking self in a passion of earnest love for and service to the City of God. Such love is in itself well-being; and while it may have no rewards

appreciable by sense, it cannot fail of sharing in the good of Zion and the prosperity of God's chosen.

The singer puts forth the prayers which he enjoins on others, and rises high above all considerations of self. His desires are winged by two great motives,—on the one hand, his self-oblivious wish for the good of those who are knit to him by common faith and worship; on the other, his loving reverence for the sacred house of Jehovah. That house hallowed every stone in the city. To wish for the prosperity of Jerusalem, forgetting that the Temple was in it, would have been mere earthly patriotism, a very questionable virtue. To wish and struggle for the growth of an external organisation called a Church, disregarding the Presence which gives it all its sanctity, is no uncommon fault in some who think that they are actuated by "zeal for the Lord," when it is a much more earthly flame that burns in them.

PSALM CXXIII.

1 To Thee lift I mine eyes,
O Thou that art enthroned in the heavens.
2 Behold, as the eyes of slaves are towards the hand of their masters,
As the eyes of a maid are towards the hand of her mistress,
So [are] our eyes towards Jehovah our God,
Till He be gracious to us.

3 Be gracious to us, Jehovah, be gracious to us,
For we are abundantly filled with contempt.
4 Abundantly is our soul filled
With the scorn of them that are at ease,
The contempt of the proud.

A SIGH and an upward gaze and a sigh! No period is more appropriate, as that of this psalm, than the early days after the return from exile, when the little community, which had come back with high hopes, found themselves a laughing-stock to their comfortable and malicious neighbours. The contrast of tone with the joy of the preceding psalm is very striking. After the heights of devout gladness have been reached, it is still needful to come down to stern realities of struggle, and these can only be faced when the eye of patient dependence and hope is fixed on God.

That attitude is the great lesson of this brief and perfect expression of wistful yet unfaltering trust joined with absolute submission. The upward look here is like, but also unlike, that in Psalm cxxi., in that

this is less triumphant, though not less assured, and has an expression of lowly submission in the appealing gaze. Commentators quote illustrations of the silent observance of the master's look by his rows of slaves; but these are not needed to elucidate the vivid image. It tells its own story. Absolute submission to God's hand, whether it wields a rod or lavishes gifts or points to service, befits those whose highest honour is to be His slaves. They should stand where they can see Him; they should have their gaze fixed upon Him; they should look with patient trust, as well as with eager willingness to start into activity when He indicates His commands.

The sigh for deliverance, in the second half of the psalm, is no breach of that patient submission. Trust and resignation do not kill natural shrinking from contempt and scorn. It is enough that they turn shrinking into supplication and lamentations into appeals to God. He lets His servants make their moan to Him, and tell how full their souls have long been of men's scorn. As a plea with Him the psalmist urges the mockers' "ease." In their security and full-fed complacency, they laughed at the struggling band, as men gorged with material good ever do at enthusiasts; but it is better to be contemned for the difficulties which cleaving to the ruins of God's city brings, than to be the contemners in their selfish abundance. They are further designated as "haughty," by a word which the Hebrew margin reads as two words, meaning "proud ones of the oppressors"; but this is unnecessary, and the text yields a good meaning as it stands, though the word employed is unusual.

This sweet psalm, with all its pained sense of the mockers' gibes and their long duration, has no accent

of impatience. Perfect submission, fixed observance, assured confidence that, "till He is gracious," it is best to bear what He sends, befit His servants, and need not hinder their patient cry to Him, nor their telling Him how long and hard their trial has been.

PSALM CXXIV.

1 Had not Jehovah been for us,
—Thus let Israel say—
2 Had not Jehovah been for us,
When men rose against us:
3 Then had they swallowed us alive,
When their wrath blazed out upon us;
4 Then had the waters overwhelmed us,
The torrent had gone over our soul;
5 Then had gone over our soul
The proud waters.

6 Blessed be Jehovah,
Who has not given us [as] a prey to their teeth.
7 Our soul is like a bird escaped from the fowlers' snare;
The snare is broken, and we—we are escaped.
8 Our help is in the name of Jehovah,
Maker of heaven and earth.

A SEQUENCE may be traced connecting this with the two adjacent psalms. In Psalm cxxiii., patient resignation sighed for deliverance, which here has been received and has changed the singer's note into jubilant and wondering praise; while, in the next little lyric, we have the escaped Israel established in Jerusalem, and drawing omens of Divine guardianship from its impregnable position, on a mountain girt by mountains. This psalm is an outgush of the first rapture of astonishment and joy for deliverance so sudden and complete. It is most naturally taken as the expression of the feelings of the exiles on their restoration from Babylon. One thought runs through it all, that the

sole actor in their deliverance has been Jehovah. No human arm has been bared for them; no created might could have rescued them from the rush of the swelling deluge. Like a bird in a net panting with fear and helplessness, they waited the fowler's grasp; but, lo, by an unseen Power the net was broken, and they are free to wing their flight to their nest. So, triumphantly they ring out at last the Name which has been their help, abjuring any share in their own rescue, and content to owe it all to Him.

The step-like structure is very obvious in this psalm. As Delitzsch puts it, "In order to take a step forward, it always goes back half a step." But the repetitions are not mere artistic embellishments; they beautifully correspond to the feelings expressed. A heart running over with thankful surprise at its own new security and freedom cannot but reiterate the occasion of its joy. It is quite as much devotion as art which says twice over that Jehovah was on the singers' side, which twice recalls how nearly they had been submerged in the raging torrent, and twice remembers their escape from the closely wrapping but miraculously broken snare. A suppliant is not guilty of vain repetitions though he asks often for the same blessing, and thanksgiving for answered petitions should be as persistent as the petitions were. That must be a shallow gratitude which can be all poured out at one gush.

The psalmist's metaphors for Israel's danger are familiar ones. "They had swallowed us alive." may refer to the open jaws of Sheol, as in other psalms, but more probably is simply a figure drawn from beasts of prey, as in ver. 6. The other image of a furious swollen torrent sweeping over the heads (or, as here, over the soul) recalls the grand contrast drawn by Isaiah

between the gently flowing "waters of Siloam" and the devastating rush of the "river," symbolising the King of Assyria, which, like some winter torrent swollen by the rains, suddenly rises and bears on its tawny bosom to the sea the ruins of men's works and the corpses of the workers.

The word rendered "proud" is a rare word, coming from a root meaning *to boil over*, and may be used here in its literal sense, but is more probably to be taken in its metaphorical meaning of haughty, and applied rather to the persons signified by the waters than to the flood itself. Vv. 6 and 7 are an advance on the preceding, inasmuch as those described rather the imminence of danger, and these magnify the completeness of Jehovah's delivering mercy. The comparison of the soul to a bird is beautiful (Psalm xi. 1). It hints at tremors and feebleness, at alternations of feeling like the flutter of some weak-winged songster, at the utter helplessness of the panting creature in the toils. One hand only could break the snare, and then the bruised wings were swiftly spread for flight once more, and up into the blue went the ransomed joy, with a song instead o harsh notes of alarm. "We—we are escaped." That is enough: we are out of the net. Whither the flight may be directed does not concern the singer in the first bliss of recovered freedom. All blessedness is contained in the one word "escaped," which therefore he reiterates, and with which the song closes, but for that final ascription of the glory of the escape to the mighty Name of Him who made heaven and earth.

PSALM CXXV.

1 They who trust in Jehovah
Are like Mount Zion, [which] cannot be moved,
For ever it shall sit steadfast.
2 Jerusalem—mountains are round her,
And Jehovah is round His people
From now and for ever.
3 For the sceptre of the wicked shall not rest on the lot
of the righteous ones,
Lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity.

4 Do good, Jehovah, to the good,
And to the upright in their hearts.
5 And those who warp their crooked paths,
Jehovah shall make them go with the workers of iniquity.
Peace be upon Israel!

THE references to the topography of Jerusalem in vv. 1, 2, do not absolutely require, though they recommend, the supposition, already mentioned, that this psalm completes a triad which covers the experience of the restored Israel from the time just prior to its deliverance up till the period of its return to Jerusalem. The strength of the city perched on its rocky peninsula, and surrounded by guardian heights, would be the more impressive to eyes accustomed to the plains of Babylon, where the only defence of cities was artificial. If this hypothesis as to the date of the psalm is accepted, its allusions to a foreign domination and to half-hearted members of the community, as distinguished from manifest workers of evil, fall in with the facts

of the period. The little band of faithful men was surrounded by foes, and there were faint hearts among themselves, ready to temporise and "run with the hare," as well as "hunt with the hounds." In view of deliverance accomplished and of perils still to be faced, the psalmist sings this strong brief song of commendation of the excellence of Trust, anticipates as already fulfilled the complete emancipation of the land from alien rule, and proclaims, partly in prayer and partly in prediction, the great law of retribution—certain blessedness for those who are good, and destruction for the faithless.

The first of the two grand images in vv. 1, 2, sets forth the stability of those who trust in Jehovah. The psalmist pictures Mount Zion somewhat singularly as "sitting steadfast," whereas the usual expression would be "stands firm." But the former conveys still more forcibly the image and impression of calm, effortless immobility. Like some great animal couched at ease, the mountain lies there, in restful strength. Nothing can shake it, except One Presence, before which the hills "skip like young rams." Thus quietly steadfast and lapped in repose, not to be disturbed by any external force, should they be who trust in Jehovah, and shall be in the measure of their trust.

But trust could not bring such steadfastness, unless the other figure in ver. 2 represented a fact. The steadfastness of the trustful soul is the consequence of the encircling defence of Jehovah's power. The mountain fortress is girdled by mountains; not, indeed, as if it was ringed about by an unbroken circle of manifestly higher peaks; but still Olivet rises above Zion on the east, and a spur of higher ground runs out thence and overlooks it on the north, while the

levels rise to the west, and the so-called Hill of Evil Counsel is on the south. They are not conspicuous summits, but they hide the city from those approaching, till their tops are reached. Perhaps the very inconspicuousness of these yet real defences suggested to the poet the invisible protection which to purblind eyes looked so poor, but was so valid. The hills of Bashan might look scornfully across Jordan to the humble heights round Jerusalem; but they were enough to guard the city. The psalmist uses no words of comparison, but lays his two facts side by side: the mountains round Jerusalem—Jehovah round His people. That circumvallation is their defence. They who have the everlasting hills for their bulwark need not trouble themselves to build a wall such as Babylon needed. Man's artifices for protection are impertinent when God flings His hand round His people. Zechariah, the prophet of the Restoration, drew that conclusion from the same thought, when he declared that Jerusalem should be "inhabited as villages without walls," because Jehovah would be "unto her a wall of fire round about" (Zech. ii. 4, 5).

Ver. 3 seems at first sight to be appended to the preceding in defiance of logical connection, for its "for" would more naturally have been "therefore," since the deliverance of the land from foreign invaders is a consequence of Jehovah's protection. But the psalmist's faith is so strong that he regards that still further deliverance as already accomplished, and adduces it as a confirmation of the fact that Jehovah ever guards His people. In the immediate historical reference this verse points to a period when the lot of the righteous—*i.e.*, the land of Israel—was, as it were, weighed down by the crushing sceptre of some alien

power that had long lain on it. But the psalmist is sure that that is not going to last, because his eyes are lifted to the hills whence his aid comes. With like tenacity and longsightedness, Faith ever looks onward to the abolition of present evils, however stringent may be their grip, and however heavy may be the sceptre which Evil in possession of the heritage of God wields. The rod of the oppressor shall be broken, and one more proof given that they dwell safely who dwell encircled by God.

The domination of evil, if protracted too long, may tempt good men, who are righteous because they trust, to lose their faith and so to lose their righteousness, and make common cause with apparently triumphant iniquity. It needs Divine wisdom to determine how long a trial must last in order that it may test faith, thereby strengthening it, and may not confound faith, thereby precipitating feeble souls into sin. He knows when to say, It is enough.

So the psalm ends with prayer and prediction, which both spring from the insight into Jehovah's purposes which trust gives. The singer asks that the good may receive good, in accordance with the law of retribution. The expressions describing these are very noticeable, especially when connected with the designation of the same persons in ver. 1 as those who trust in Jehovah. Trust makes righteous and good and upright in heart. If these characteristics are to be distinguished, *righteous* may refer to action in conformity with the law of God, *good* to the more gentle and beneficent virtues, and *upright in heart* to inward sincerity. Such persons will get "good" from Jehovah, the God of recompenses, and that good will be as various as their necessities and as wide as their capacities. But the righteous

Protector of those who trust in Him is so, partly because He smites as well as blesses, and therefore the other half of the law of retribution comes into view, not as a petition, but as prediction. The psalmist uses a vivid image to describe half-hearted adherents to the people of Jehovah: "they bend their ways," so as to make them crooked. Sometimes the tortuous path points towards one direction, and then it swerves to almost the opposite. "Those crooked, wandering ways," in which irresolute men, who do not clearly know whether they are for Jehovah or for the other side, live lives miserable from vacillation, can never lead to steadfastness or to any good. The psalmist has taken his side. He knows whom he is for; and he knows, too, that there is at bottom little to choose between the coward who would fain be in both camps and the open antagonist. Therefore they shall share the same fate.

Finally the poet, stretching out his hands over all Israel, as if blessing them like a priest, embraces all his hopes, petitions, and wishes in the one prayer "Peace be upon Israel!" He means the true Israel of God (Gal. vi. 16), upon whom the Apostle, with a reminiscence possibly of this psalm, invokes the like blessing, and whom he defines in the same spirit as the psalmist does, as those who walk according to this rule, and not according to the crooked paths of their own devising.

PSALM CXXVI.

1 When Jehovah brought back the captives of Zion,
We were like as if dreaming.
2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongues with joyful cries;
Then said they among the nations,
Jehovah has done great things with these [people].
3 Jehovah has done great things with us;
We were glad.

4 Bring back, Jehovah, our captives,
Like watercourses in the Southland.
5 They who sow with tears
With joyful cries shall reap.
6 [The husbandman] goes, going and weeping,
[While] bearing the handful of seed;
He shall surely come with joyful cries,
[When] bearing his sheaves.

AS in Psalm lxxxv., the poet's point of view here is in the midst of a partial restoration of Israel. In vv. 1–3 he rejoices over its happy beginning, while in vv. 4–6 he prays for and confidently expects its triumphant completion. Manifestly the circumstances fit the period to which most of these pilgrim psalms are to be referred—namely, the dawn of the restoration from Babylon. Here the pressure of the difficulties and hostility which the returning exiles met is but slightly expressed. The throb of wondering gratitude is still felt; and though tears mingle with laughter, and hard work which bears no immediate result has to be done, the singer's confidence is unfaltering.

His words set a noble example of the spirit in which inchoate deliverances should be welcomed, and toil for their completion encountered with the lightheartedness which is folly if it springs from self-trust, but wisdom and strength if its ground is the great things which Jehovah has begun to do.

The word in ver. 1 rendered captives is capable of other meanings. It is an unusual form, and is probably an error for the more common word which occurs in ver. 4. It is most probable that the expressions should be identical in both instances, though small changes in a refrain are not infrequent. But if this correction is adopted, there is room for difference of opinion as to the meaning of the phrase. Cheyne, with the support of several other commentators, takes the phrase to mean "turn the fortunes" (lit., a turning), but allows that the "debate is not absolutely closed" (Critical Note on Psalm xiv. 7). The ordinary rendering is, however, more natural, "captivity" being the mass of captives. Others would regard the two words in vv. 1 and 4 as different, and render the former "those who return" (Delitzsch) or "the returned" (Perowne).

Sudden and great revolutions for the better have for their first effect bewilderment and a sense of unreality. Most men have some supreme moment of blessedness in their memories with which they were stunned; but, alas! it is oftener the rush of unexpected miseries that makes them wonder whether they are awake or dreaming. It is not lack of faith, but slowness in accommodating oneself to surprising new conditions, which makes these seem unreal at first. "The sober certainty of waking bliss" is sweeter than the first raptures. It is good to have had such experience of

walking, as it were, on air; but it is better to plant firm feet on firm ground.

The mood of the first part of this little psalm is momentary; but the steadfast toil amid discouragements, not uncheered by happy confidence, which is pictured in the second part, should be the permanent temper of those who have once tasted the brief emotion. The jubilant laughter and ringing cries with which the exiles streamed forth from bondage, and made the desert echo as they marched, witnessed to the nations that Jehovah had magnified His dealings with them. Their extorted acknowledgment is caught up triumphantly by the singer. He, as it were, thanks the Gentiles for teaching him that word. There is a world of restrained feeling, all the more impressive for the simplicity of the expression, in that quiet "We became glad." When the heathen attested the reality of the deliverance, Israel became calmly conscious of it. These exclamations of envious onlookers sufficed to convince the returning exiles that it was no dream befooling them. Tumultuous feeling steadied itself into conscious joy. There is no need to say more. The night of weeping was past, and Joy was their companion in the fresh morning light.

But the work was but partly done. Difficulties and hardships were not abolished from the world, as Israel had half expected in the first flush of joy. We all are apt to think so, when some long wished and faintly hoped-for good is ours at last. But not such is the Divine purpose for any life here. He gives moments of untroubled joy, when no cloud stains the blue and all the winds are still, in order to prepare us for toil amid tempests and gloomy skies. So the second half of the psalm breathes petitions for the completion of

the Restoration, and animates the returned exiles with assurances that, whatever may be their toils, and however rough the weather in which they have to sow the seed, and however heavy the hearts with which they do it, "the slow result of winter showers" is sure. Lessons of persevering toil, of contented doing of preparatory work, of confidence that no such labour can fail to be profitable to the doer and to the world, have been drawn for centuries from the sweet words of this psalm. Who can tell how many hearts they have braced, how much patient toil they have inspired? The psalmist was sowing seed, the fruit of which he little dreamed of, when he wrote them, and his sheaves will be an exceeding weight indeed.

The metaphor in ver. 4 brings before the imagination the dried torrent-beds in the arid Negeb, or Southland, which runs out into the Arabian desert. Dreary and desolate as these dried wadies lie bleaching in the sunshine, so disconsolate and lonely had the land been without inhabitants. The psalmist would fain see, not the thin trickle of a streamlet, to which the returned captives might be compared, but a full, great rush of rejoicing fellow-countrymen coming back, like the torrents that fill the silent watercourses with flashing life.

He prays, and he also prophesies. "They who sow with tears" are the pioneers of the return, to whom he belonged. Vv. 6, 7, merely expand the figure of ver. 5 with the substitution of the image of a single husbandman for the less vivid, clear-cut plural. The expression rendered "handful of seed" means literally a "draught of seed"—*i.e.*, the quantity taken out of the basket or cloth at one grasp, in order to be sown. It is difficult to convey the force of the infinitives in combination with participles and the finite verb in ver. 6.

But the first half of the verse seems to express repeated actions on the part of the husbandman, who often goes forth to sow, and weeps as he goes; while the second half expresses the certainty of his glad coming in with his arms full of sheaves. The meaning of the figure needs no illustration. It gives assurances fitted to animate to toil in the face of dangers without, and in spite of a heavy heart—namely, that no seed sown and watered with tears is lost; and further, that, though it often seems to be the law for earth that one soweth and another reapeth, in deepest truth "every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour," inasmuch as, hereafter, if not now, whatsoever of faith and toil and holy endeavour a man soweth, trusting to God to bless the springing thereof, that shall he also reap. In the highest sense and in the last result the prophet's great words are ever true: "They shall not plant, and another eat . . . for My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isa. lxv. 22).

PSALM CXXVII.

1 If Jehovah build not a house,
Vainly do its builders toil upon it;
If Jehovah keeps not a city,
Vainly wakes the keeper.
2 Vain is it for you, ye that make early [your] rising
and your sitting down late,
That eat the bread of painful toil;
Even so He gives [it] to His beloved while in sleep.

3 Behold, sons are an heritage from Jehovah,
The fruit of the womb is [His] reward.
4 Like arrows in the hand of a mighty man,
So are sons of [a father's] youth.
5 Happy the man who has filled his quiver with them,
They shall not be ashamed
When they speak with enemies in the gate.

THIS pure expression of conscious dependence on God's blessing for all well-being may possibly have special reference to the Israel of the Restoration. The instances of vain human effort and care would then have special force, when the ruins of many generations had to be rebuilt and the city to be guarded. But there is no need to seek for specific occasion, so general is this psalm. It sings in a spirit of happy trust the commonplace of all true religion, that God's blessing prospers all things, and that effort is vain without it. There is no sweeter utterance of that truth anywhere, till we come to our Lord's parallel teaching, lovelier

still than that of our psalm, when He points us to the flowers of the field and the fowls of the air, as our teachers of the joyous, fair lives that can be lived, when no carking care mars their beauty.

In ver. 1 the examples chosen by the singer are naturally connected. The house when built is one in the many that make the city. The owner's troubles are not over when it is built, since it has to be watched. It is as hard to keep as to acquire earthly goods. The psalmist uses the past tenses in describing the vanity of building and watching unblessed by God. "They" have built in vain, and watched in vain. He, as it were, places us at the point of time when the failure is developed,—the half-built house a ruin, the city sacked and in flames.

Ver. 2 deals with domestic life within the built house and guarded city. It is vain to eke out the laborious day by early beginning and late ending. Long hours do not mean prosperous work. The evening meal may be put off till a late hour; and when the toil-worn man sits down to it, he may eat bread made bitter by labour. But all is in vain without God's blessing. The last clause of the verse must be taken as presenting a contrast to the futile labour reprehended in the former clauses; and therefore the beautiful rendering of the A.V. must be abandoned, though it has given many sweet thoughts to trustful souls, and none sweeter than in Mrs. Browning's pathetic lines. But clearly the contrast is between labour which effects nothing, but is like spinning ropes out of sea-sand, and God's gift of the good which the vain toil had aimed at, and which He gives to His beloved in their sleep. "So" seems here to be equivalent to "Even so," and the thought intended is probably that God's gift to His

beloved secures to them the same result as is ineffectually sought by godless struggles.

This is no preaching of laziness masquerading as religious trust. The psalmist insists on one side of the truth. Not work, but self-torturing care and work, without seeking God's blessing, are pronounced vanity.

The remainder of the psalm dwells on one special instance of God's gifts, that of a numerous family, which, in accordance with the Hebrew sentiment, is regarded as a special blessing. But the psalmist is carried beyond his immediate purpose of pointing out that that chief earthly blessing, as he and his contemporaries accounted it, is God's gift, and he lingers on the picture of a father surrounded in his old age by a band of stalwart sons born unto him in his vigorous youth, and so now able to surround him with a ring of strong protectors of his declining days. "They shall speak with their enemies in the gate." Probably "they" refers to the whole band, the father in the midst and his sons about him. The gate was the place where justice was administered, and where was the chief place of concourse. It is therefore improbable that actual warfare is meant: rather, in the disputes which might arise with neighbours, and in the intercourse of city life, which would breed enmities enough, the man with his sons about him could hold his own. And such blessing is God's gift.

The lesson of the psalm is one that needs to be ever repeated. It is so obvious that it is unseen by many, and apt to be unnoticed by all. There are two ways of going to work in reference to earthly good. One is that of struggling and toiling, pushing and snatching, fighting and envying, and that way comes to no successful issue; for if it gets what it has wriggled

and wrestled for, it generally gets in some way or other an incapacity to enjoy the good won, which makes it far less than the good pursued. The other way is the way of looking to God and doing the appointed tasks with quiet dependence on Him, and that way always succeeds; for, with its modest or large outward results, there is given likewise a quiet heart set on God, and therefore capable of finding water in the desert and extracting honey from the rock. The one way is that of "young lions," who, for all their claws and strength, "do lack and suffer hunger"; the other is that of "them that seek the Lord," who "shall not want any good."

PSALM CXXVIII.

1 Happy is every one that fears Jehovah,
That walks in His ways.
2 The labour of thy hands shalt thou surely eat,—
Happy art thou, and it is well with thee.
3 Thy wife [shall be] like a fruitful vine in the inmost
chambers of thy house,
Thy children like young olive plants round thy table.
4 Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed
Who fears Jehovah.

5 Jehovah bless thee out of Zion!
And mayest thou look on the prosperity of Jerusalem
All the days of thy life,
6 And see children to thy children!
Peace be upon Israel!

THE preceding psalm traced all prosperity and domestic felicity to God's giving hand. It painted in its close the picture of a father surrounded by his sons able to defend him. This psalm presents the same blessings as the result of a devout life, in which the fear of Jehovah leads to obedienee and diligence in labour. It presents the inner side of domestic happiness. It thus doubly supplements the former, lest any should think that God's gift superseded man's work, or that the only blessedness of fatherhood was that it supplied a corps of sturdy defenders. The first four verses describe the peaceful, happy life of the God-fearing man, and the last two invoke on him the blessing which alone makes such a life his. Blended

with the sweet domesticity of the psalm is glowing love for Zion. However blessed the home, it is not to weaken the sense of belonging to the nation.

No purer, fairer idyll was ever penned than this miniature picture of a happy home life. But its calm, simple beauty has deep foundations. The poet sets forth the basis of all noble, as of all tranquil, life when he begins with the fear of Jehovah, and thence advances to practical conformity with His will, manifested by walking in the paths which He traces for men. Thence the transition is easy to the mention of diligent labour, and the singer is sure that such toil done on such principles and from such a motive cannot go unblessed. Outward prosperity does not follow good men's work so surely as the letter of the psalm teaches, but the best fruits of such work are not those which can be stored in barns or enjoyed by sense; and the labourer who does his work "heartily, as to the Lord," will certainly reap a harvest in character and power and communion with God, whatever transitory gain may be attained or missed.

The sweet little sketch of a joyous home in ver. 3 is touched with true grace and feeling. The wife is happy in her motherhood, and ready, in the inner chambers (literally *sides*) of the house, where she does her share of work, to welcome her husband returning from the field. The family gathers for the meal won and sweetened by his toil; the children are in vigorous health, and growing up like young "layered" olive plants. It may be noted that this verse exhibits a home in the earlier stages of married life, and reflects the happy hopes associated with youthful children, all still gathered under the father's roof; while, in the latter part of the psalm, a later stage is in view, when

the father sits as a spectator rather than a worker, and sees children born to his children. Ver. 4 emphatically dwells once more on the foundation of all as laid in the fear of Jehovah. Happy a nation whose poets have such ideals and sing of such themes! How wide the gulf separating this "undisturbed song" of pure home joys from the foul ideals which baser songs try to adorn! Happy the man whose ambition is bounded by its limits, and whose life is

"True to the kindred points of heaven and home"!

Israel first taught the world how sacred the family is; and Christianity recognises "a church in the house" of every wedded pair whose love is hallowed by the fear of Jehovah.

In vv. 5, 6, petitions take the place of assurances, for the singer knows that none of the good which he has been promising will come without that blessing of which the preceding psalm had spoken. All the beautiful and calm joys just described must flow from God, and be communicated from that place which is the seat of His self-revelation. The word rendered above "mayest thou look" is in the imperative form, which seems here to be intended to blend promise, wish, and command. It is the duty of the happiest husband and father not to let himself be so absorbed in the sweets of home as to have his heart beat languidly for the public weal. The subtle selfishness which is but too commonly the accompaniment of such blessings is to be resisted. From his cheerful hearth the eyes of a lover of Zion are to look out, and be gladdened when they see prosperity smiling on Zion. Many a Christian is so happy in his household that his duties to the Church, the nation, and the world are neglected. This

ancient singer had a truer conception of the obligations flowing from personal and domestic blessings. He teaches us that it is not enough to "see children's children," unless we have eyes to look for the prosperity of Jerusalem, and tongues which pray not only for those in our homes, but for "peace upon Israel."

PSALM CXXIX.

1 Sorely have they oppressed me from my youth,
Let Israel now say,
2 Sorely have they oppressed me from my youth,
But they have not also prevailed against me.
3 On my back the ploughers ploughed,
They made their furrows long.
4 Jehovah the righteous
Has cut the cord of the wicked.

5 Let them be shamed and turned back,
All they who hate Zion.
6 Let them be as the grass of the housetops,
Which, before it shoots forth, withers:
7 With which the mower fills not his hand,
Nor the sheaf-binder his bosom;
8 And the passers-by say not,
"The blessing of Jehovah be to you!"
"We bless you in the name of Jehovah!"

THE point of view here is the same as in Psalm cxxiv., with which the present psalm has much similarity both in subject and in expression. It is a retrospect of Israel's past, in which the poet sees a uniform exemplification of two standing facts—sore affliction and wonderful deliverance. The bush burned, *nec tamen consumebatur.* "Cast down, but not destroyed," is the summary of the Church's history. No doubt the recent deliverance from captivity underlies this, as most of the pilgrim psalms. The second part (vv. 5–8) blends confidence and wish, founded on the experience recorded in the first part, and prophesies and desires

the overthrow of Israel's foes. The right use of retrospect is to make it the ground of hope. They who have passed unscathed through such afflictions may well be sure that any to-morrow shall be as the yesterdays were, and that all future assaults will fail as all past ones have failed.

The words which Israel is called upon to say twice with triumphant remembrance are the motto of the *Ecclesia pressa* in all ages. Ever there is antagonism; never is there overthrow. Israel's "youth" was far back in the days of Egyptian bondage; and many an affliction has he since met, but he lives still, and his existence proves that "they have not prevailed against" him. Therefore the backward look is gladsome, though it sees so many trials. Survived sorrows yield joy and hope, as gashes in trees exude precious gums.

Ver. 3 expresses Israel's oppressions by a strong metaphor, in which two figures are blended—a slave under the lash, and a field furrowed by ploughing. Cruel lords had laid on the whip, till the victim's back was scored with long wounds, straight and parallel, like the work of a ploughman. The Divine deliverance follows in ver. 4. The first words of the verse do not stand in the usual order, if rendered "Jehovah is righteous," and are probably to be taken as above; "righteous" standing in apposition to "Jehovah," and expressing the Divine characteristic which guaranteed and, in due time, accomplished Israel's deliverance. God could not but be true to His covenant obligations. Therefore He cut the "cord of the wicked." The figure is here changed to one occasioned by the former. Israel is now the draught ox harnessed to the plough; and thus both sides of his bondage are expressed—cruel treatment by the former, and hard toil by the latter,

figure. The same act which, in the parallel 124th Psalm, is described as breaking the fowler's snare, is in view here; and the restoration from Babylon suits the circumstances completely.

The story of past futile attempts against Israel animates the confidence and vindicates the wish breathed in the latter half of the psalm. To hate Zion, which Jehovah so manifestly loves and guards, must be suicidal. It is something far nobler than selfish vengeance which desires and foresees the certain failure of attempts against it. The psalmist is still under the influence of his earlier metaphor of the ploughed field, but now has come to think of the harvest. The graphic image of the grass on flat housetops of clay, which springs quickly because it has no depth of earth, and withers as it springs, vividly describes the short-lived success and rapid extinction of plots against Zion and of the plotters. The word rendered above "shoots forth" is by some translated "is plucked up," and that meaning is defensible, but grass on the housetops would scarcely be worth plucking, and the word is used elsewhere for unsheathing a sword. It may, therefore, be taken here to refer to the shooting out of the spikelets from their covering. The psalmist dilates upon his metaphor in ver. 7, which expresses the fruitlessness of assaults on God's chosen. No harvest is to be reaped from such sowing. The enemies may plot and toil, and before their plans have had time to bud they are smitten into brown dust; and when the contrivers come expecting success, there is nothing to mow or gather. "They look for much, and behold little." So it has been; so it shall be; so it should be; so may it be, wishes the psalmist; and true hearts will say Amen to his aspiration.

Such reapers have no joy in harvest, and no man can invoke Jehovah's blessing on their bad work. Ver. 8 brings up a lovely little picture of a harvest field, where passers-by shout their good wishes to the glad toilers, and are answered by these with like salutations. It is doubtful whether ver. 8 *c* is spoken by by the passers-by or is the reapers' responsive greeting. The latter explanation gives animation to the scene. But in any case the verse suggests by contrast the gloomy silence of Israel's would-be destroyers, who find, as all who set themselves against Jehovah's purposes do find, that He blasts their plans with His breath, and makes their "harvest an heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow."

PSALM CXXX.

1 Out of the depths have I cried to Thee, Jehovah.
2 Lord, hearken to my voice,
Be Thine ears attent
To the voice of my supplications.

3 If Thou, Jah, shouldest mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?—
4 For with Thee is forgiveness,
That Thou mayest be feared.

5 I have waited for Jehovah,
And in His word have I hoped.
6 My soul [hopes] for the Lord
More than watchers for the morning,
—Watchers for the morning.

7 Let Israel hope in Jehovah,
For with Jehovah is loving-kindness,
And in abundance with Him is redemption.
8 And He—He will redeem Israel
From all his iniquities.

IN a very emphatic sense this is a song of ascents, for it climbs steadily from the abyss of penitence to the summits of hope. It falls into two divisions of four verses each, of which the former breathes the prayer of a soul penetrated by the consciousness of sin, and the latter the peaceful expectance of one that has tasted God's forgiving mercy. These two parts are again divided into two groups of two verses, so that there are four stages in the psalmist's progress from the depths to the sunny heights.

In the first group we have the psalmist's cry. He has called, and still calls. He reiterates in ver. 2 the prayer that he had long offered and still presents. It is not only quotation, but is the cry of present need. What are these "depths" from which his voice sounds, as that of a man fallen into a pit and sending up a faint call? The expression does not merely refer to his creatural lowliness, nor even to his troubles, nor even to his depression of spirit. There are deeper pits than these—those into which the spirit feels itself going down, sick and giddy, when it realises its sinfulness. Unless a man has been down in that black abyss, he has scarcely cried to God as he should do. The beginning of true personal religion is the sense of personal sin. A slight conception of the gravity of that fact underlies inadequate conceptions of Christ's nature and work, and is the mother of heresies in creed and superficialities and deadnesses in practice. A religion that sits lightly upon its professor, impelling to no acts of devotion, flashing out in no heroisms, rising to no heights of communion—that is to say, the average Christianity of great masses of so-called Christians—bears proof, in its languor, that the man knows nothing about the depths, and has never cried to God from them. Further, if out of the depths we cry, we shall cry ourselves out of the depths. What can a man do who finds himself at the foot of a beetling cliff, the sea in front, the wall of rock at his back, without foothold for a mouse, between the tide at the bottom and the grass at the top? He can do but one thing: he can shout, and perhaps may be heard, and a rope may come dangling down that he can spring at and clutch. For sinful men in the miry pit the rope is already let down, and their grasping it is the same act as the

psalmist's cry. God has let down His forgiving love in Christ, and we need but the faith which accepts while it asks, and then we are swung up into the light, and our feet set on a rock.

Vv. 3, 4, are the second stage. A dark fear shadows the singer's soul, and is swept away by a joyful assurance. The word rendered above "mark" is literally *keep* or *watch*, as in ver. 6, and here seems to mean to *take account of*, or *retain* in remembrance, in order to punish. If God should take man's sin into account in His dispositions and dealings, "O Lord, who shall stand?" No man could sustain that righteous judgment. He must go down before it like a flimsy hut before a whirlwind, or a weak enemy before a fierce charge. That thought comes to the psalmist like a blast of icy air from the north, and threatens to chill his hope to death and to blow his cry back into his throat. But its very hypothetical form holds a negation concealed in it. Such an implied negative is needed in order to explain the "for" of ver. 4. The singer springs, as it were, to that confidence by a rebound from the other darker thought. We must have tremblingly entertained the contrary dread possibility, before we can experience the relief and gladness of its counter-truth. The word rendered "forgiveness" is a late form, being found only in two other late passages (Neh. ix. 17; Dan. ix. 9). It literally means *cutting off*, and so suggests the merciful surgery by which the cancerous tumour is taken out of the soul. Such forgiveness is "with God," inherent in His nature. And that forgiveness lies at the root of true godliness. No man reverences, loves, and draws near to God so rapturously and so humbly as he who has made experience of His pardoning mercy, lifting a soul from its

abysses of sin and misery. Therefore the psalmist, taught by what pardon has done for him in drawing him lovingly near to God, declares that its great purpose is "that Thou mayest be feared," and that not only by the recipient, but by beholders. Strangely enough, many commentators have found a difficulty in this idea, which seems sun-clear to those whose own history explains it to them. Grätz, for instance, calls it "completely unintelligible." It has been very intelligible to many a penitent who has been by pardon transformed into a reverent lover of God.

The next stage in the ascent from the depths is in vv. 5, 6, which breathe peaceful, patient hope. It may be doubtful whether the psalmist means to represent that attitude of expectance as prior to and securing forgiveness or as consequent upon it. The latter seems the more probable. A soul which has received God's forgiveness is thereby led into tranquil, continuous, ever-rewarded waiting on Him, and hope of new gifts springs ever fresh in it. Such a soul sits quietly at His feet, trusting to His love, and looking for light and all else needed, to flow from Him. The singleness of the object of devout hope, the yearning which is not impatience, characterising that hope at its noblest, are beautifully painted in the simile of the watchers for morning. As they who have outwatched the long night look eagerly to the flush that creeps up in the east, telling that their vigil is past, and heralding the stir and life of a new day with its wakening birds and fresh morning airs, so this singer's eyes had turned to God, and to Him only. Ver. 6 does not absolutely require the supplement "hopes." It may read simply "My soul is towards Jehovah"; and that translation gives still more emphatically the notion of complete

turning of the whole being to God. Consciousness of sin was as a dark night; forgiveness flushed the Eastern heaven with prophetic twilight. So the psalmist waits for the light, and his soul is one aspiration towards God.

In vv. 7, 8, the psalmist becomes an evangelist, inviting Israel to unite in his hope, that they may share in his pardon. In the depths he was alone, and felt as if the only beings in the universe were God and himself. The consciousness of sin isolates, and the sense of forgiveness unites. Whoever has known that "with Jehovah is pardon" is impelled thereby to invite others to learn the same lesson in the same sweet way. The psalmist has a broad gospel to preach, the generalisation of his own history. He had said in ver. 4 that "with Jehovah is forgiveness" (lit. *the* forgiveness, possibly meaning *the needed forgiveness*), and he thereby had animated his own hope. Now he repeats the form of expression, only that he substitutes for "forgiveness" the loving-kindness which is its spring, and the redemption which is its result; and these he presses upon his fellows as reasons and encouragements for their hope. It is "abundant redemption," or "multiplied," as the word might be rendered. "Seventy times seven"—the perfect numbers seven and ten being multiplied together and their sum increased sevenfold—make a numerical symbol for the unfailing pardons which we are to bestow; and the sum of the Divine pardon is surely greater than that of the human. God's forgiving grace is mightier than all sins, and able to conquer them all.

"He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities"; not only from their consequences in punishment, but from their power, as well as from their guilt and their

penalty. The psalmist means something a great deal deeper than deliverance from calamities which conscience declared to be the chastisement of sin. He speaks New Testament language. He was sure that God would redeem from all iniquity; but he lived in the twilight dawn, and had to watch for the morning. The sun is risen for us; but the light is the same in quality, though more in degree: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

PSALM CXXXI.

1 Jehovah, not haughty is my heart,
And not lofty are mine eyes;
And I go not into great things,
Nor things too wonderful for me.
2 I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with its mother,
Like the weaned child is my soul with me.

3 Let Israel hope in Jehovah,
From now, even for evermore.

A QUIET, because self-quieted, heart speaks here in quiet accents, not unlike the "crooning" of the peaceful child on its mother's bosom, to which the sweet singer likens his soul. The psalm is the most perfect expression of the child-like spirit, which, as Christ has taught, is characteristic of the subjects of the kingdom of heaven. It follows a psalm of penitence, in which a contrite soul waited on Jehovah for pardon, and, finding it, exhorted Israel to hope in His redemption from all iniquity. Consciousness of sin and conscious reception of redemption therefrom precede true lowliness, and such lowliness should follow such consciousness.

The psalmist does not pray; still less does he contradict his lowliness in the very act of declaring it, by pluming himself on it. He speaks in that serene and happy mood, sometimes granted to lowly souls, when fruition is more present than desire, and the child,

folded to the Divine heart, feels its blessedness so satisfyingly that fears and hopes, wishes and dreams, are still. Simple words best speak tranquil joys. One note only is sounded in this psalm, which might almost be called a lullaby. How many hearts it has helped to hush!

The haughtiness which the psalmist disclaims has its seat in the heart and its manifestation in supercilious glances. The lowly heart looks higher than the proud one does, for it lifts its eyes to the hills, and fixes them on Jehovah, as a slave on his lord. Lofty thoughts of self naturally breed ambitions which seek great spheres and would intermeddle with things above reach. The singer does not refer to questions beyond solution by human faculty, but to worldly ambitions aiming at prominence and position. He aims low, as far as earth is concerned; but he aims high, for his mark is in the heavens.

Shaking off such ambitions and loftiness of spirit, he has found repose, as all do who clear their hearts of that perilous stuff. But it is to be noted that the calm which he enjoys is the fruit of his own self-control, by which his dominant self has smoothed and stilled the sensitive nature with its desires and passions. It is not the tranquillity of a calm nature which speaks here, but that into which the speaker has entered, by vigorous mastery of disturbing elements. How hard the struggle had been, how much bitter crying and petulant resistance there had been before the calm was won, is told by the lovely image of the weaned child. While being weaned it sobs and struggles, and all its little life is perturbed. So no man comes to have a quiet heart without much resolute self-suppression. But the figure tells of ultimate repose, even more

plainly than of preceding struggle. For, once the process is accomplished, the child nestles satisfied on the mother's warm bosom, and wishes nothing more than to lie there. So the man who has manfully taken in hand his own weaker and more yearning nature, and directed its desires away from earth by fixing them on God, is freed from the misery of hot desire, and passes into calm. He that ceases from his own works enters into rest. If a man thus compels his "soul" to cease its cravings for what earth can give, he will have to disregard its struggles and cries, but these will give place to quietness; and the fruition of the blessedness of setting all desires on God will be the best defence against the recurrence of longings once silenced.

The psalmist would fain have all Israel share in his quietness of heart, and closes his tender snatch of song with a call to them to hope in Jehovah, whereby they, too, may enter into peace. The preceding psalm ended with the same call; but there God's mercy in dealing with sin was principally in question, while here His sufficiency for all a soul's wants is implied. The one secret of forgiveness and deliverance from iniquity is also the secret of rest from tyrannous longings and disturbing desires. Hope in Jehovah brings pardon, purity, and peace.

PSALM CXXXII.

1 Remember, Jehovah, to David
All the pains he took
2 Who swore to Jehovah,
[And] vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
3 "I will not go into the tent of my house,
I will not go up to the bed of my couch,
4 I will not give sleep to mine eyes,
To mine eyelids slumber,
5 Till I find a place for Jehovah,
A habitation for the Mighty One of Jacob."

6 Behold, we heard [of] it at Ephrathah,
We found it in the Fields of the Wood.
7 Let us come to His habitation,
Let us bow ourselves at His footstool.

8 Arise, Jehovah, to Thy rest,
Thou and the Ark of Thy strength.
9 Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness,
And Thy favoured ones utter shrill cries of joy.
10 For the sake of David Thy servant,
Turn not away the face of Thine anointed.

11 Jehovah has sworn to David,
It is truth—He will not go back from it—
"Of the fruit of thy body will I set on thy throne.
12 If thy sons keep My covenant
And My testimonies which I will teach them,
Their sons also for ever and aye
Shall sit on thy throne."

13 For Jehovah has chosen Zion,
He has desired it for His dwelling.
14 "This is My rest for ever and aye,
Here will I abide, for I have desired it.

15 Her provision blessing I will bless,
Her poor will I satisfy with bread.
16 Her priests also will I clothe with salvation,
And her favoured ones uttering will utter shrill cries of joy.
17 There will I cause a horn to sprout for David,
I have trimmed a lamp for Mine anointed.
18 His enemies will I clothe with shame,
But upon himself shall his crown glitter."

THE continuance of "the sure mercies of David" to his descendants for his sake is first besought from God, and is then promised, for his sake, by God Himself, speaking in the singer's spirit. The special blessing sought for is Jehovah's dwelling in His house, which is here contemplated as reared after long toil. Expositors differ, as usual, in regard to the date and occasion of this psalm. Its place among the pilgrim psalms raises a presumption in favour of a post-exilic date, and one class of commentators refers it confidently to the period of the rebuilding of the Temple. But the mention of the Ark (which disappeared after the destruction of Solomon's Temple) can be reconciled with that supposed date only by a somewhat violent expedient. Nor is it easy to suppose that the repeated references to David's descendants as reigning in accordance with God's promise could have been written at a time when there was no king in Israel. Zerubbabel has, indeed, been suggested as "the anointed" of this psalm; but he was not king, and neither in fact nor in idea was he anointed. And could a singer in Israel, in the post-exilic period, have recalled the ancient promises without some passing sigh for their apparent falsification in the present? Psalm lxxxix. is often referred to as the "twin" of this psalm. Its wailings over the vanished glories of the Davidic monarchy have nothing corresponding to them here. These con-

siderations are against a post-exilic date, for which the chief argument is the inclusion of the psalm in the collection of pilgrim songs.

If, on the other hand, we disregard its place in the Psalter and look at its contents, it must be admitted that they perfectly harmonise with the supposition that its occasion was the completion of Solomon's Temple. The remembrance of David's long-cherished purpose to build the House, of the many wanderings of the Ark, the glad summons to enter the courts to worship, the Divine promises to David, which were connected with his design of building a Temple, all fit in with this view of the occasion of the psalm. Singularly enough, some advocates of later dates than even the building of the second Temple catch in the psalm tones of depression, and see indications of its having been written when the glowing promises which it quotes appeared to have failed. It is not in reference to "Nature" only that "we receive but what we give.' To other ears, with perhaps equal though opposite bias, glad confidence in a promise, of which the incipient fulfilment was being experienced, sounds in the psalm. To some it is plain that it was written when Ark and king had been swept away; to others it is equally clear that it presupposes the existence of both. The latter view is to the present writer the more probable.

The psalm is not divided into regular strophes. There is, however, a broad division into two parts, of which vv. 1–10 form the first, the pleading of Israel with Jehovah; and vv. 11–18 the second, the answer of Jehovah to Israel. The first part is further divided into two: vv. 1–5 setting forth David's vow; vv. 6–10 the congregation's glad summons to enter the completed sanctuary, and its prayer for blessings on the wor-

shipping nation with its priests and king. The second part is Jehovah's renewed promises, which take up and surpass the people's prayer. It is broken by a single verse (13), which is an interjected utterance of Israel's.

"One remembers anything to another, when one requites him for what he has done, or when one performs for him what one has promised him" (Delitzsch). David's earnest longing to find a fixed place for the Ark, his long-continued and generous amassing of treasure for the purpose of building the Temple, are regarded as a plea with God. The solidarity of the family, which was so vividly realised in old times, reaches its highest expression in the thought that blessings to David's descendants are as if given to him, sleeping in the royal tomb. Beautifully and humbly the singer, as representing the nation, has nothing to say of the toil of the actual builders. Not the hand which executes, but the heart and mind which conceived and cherished the plan, are its true author. The psalmist gives a poetic version of David's words in 2 Sam. vii. 2. "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth in curtains," contains in germ all which the psalmist here draws out of it. He, the aged king, was almost ashamed of his own ease. "God gave him rest from his enemies," but he will not "give sleep to his eyes" till he finds out a place for Jehovah. Wearied with a stormy life, he might well have left it to others to care for the work which the prophet had told him that he was not to be permitted to begin. But not so does a true man reason. Rather, he will consecrate to God his leisure and his old age, and will rejoice to originate work which he cannot hope to see completed, and even to gather materials which happier natures and times may

turn to account. He will put his own comfort second, God's service first.

Such devotedness does make a plea with God. The psalmist's prayer goes on that supposition, and God's answer endorses it as valid. He does not require perfect faithfulness in His servants ere He prospers their work with His smile. Stained offerings, in which much of the leaven of earthly motives may be fermenting, are not therefore rejected.

Vv. 6–10 are the petitions grounded on the preceding plea, and asking that Jehovah would dwell in the sanctuary and bless the worshippers. Ver. 6 offers great difficulties. It seems clear, however, that it and the next verse are to be taken as very closely connected (note the "we" and "us" occurring in them for the only time in the psalm). They seem to describe continuous actions, of which the climax is entrance into the sanctuary. The first question as to ver. 6 is what the "it" is, which is spoken of in both clauses; and the most natural answer is—the Ark, alluded to here by anticipation, though not mentioned till ver. 8. The irregularity is slight and not unexampled. The interpretation of the verse mainly depends on the meaning of the two designations of locality, "Ephrathah" and "the fields of the Wood." Usually the former is part of the name of Bethlehem, but the Ark in all its wanderings is never said to have been there. Most probably Shiloh, in which the Ark did remain for a time, is intended. But why should Shiloh be called Ephrathah? The answer usually given, but not altogether satisfactory, is that Shiloh lay in the territory of Ephraim, and that we have instances in which an Ephraimite is called an "Ephrathite" (Judg. xii. 5; 1 Sam. i. 1; 1 Kings xi. 26), and therefore it may be

presumed that the territory of Ephraim was called Ephrathah. "The fields of the Wood," on the other hand, is taken to be a free poetic variation of the name of Kirjath-jearim (the city of the woods), where the Ark long lay, and whence it was brought up to Jerusalem by David. In this understanding of the verse, the two places where it remained longest are brought together, and the meaning of the whole verse is, "We heard that it lay long at Shiloh, but we found it in Kirjath-jearim." Delitzsch, followed by Cheyne, takes a different view, regarding "Ephrathah" as a name for the district in which Kirjath-jearim lay. He founds this explanation on the genealogies in 1 Chron. ii. 19, 50, according to which Caleb's wife, Ephrath, was the mother of Hur, the ancestor of the Bethlehemites, and whose son Shobal was the ancestor of the people of Kirjath-jearim; Ephrathah was thus a fitting name for the whole district, which included both Bethlehem and Kirjath-jearim. In this understanding of the names, the verse means, "We heard that the Ark was at Kirjath-jearim, and there we found it."

Ver. 7 must be taken as immediately connected with the preceding. If the same persons who found the Ark still speak, the "tabernacle" into which they encourage each other to enter must be the tent within which, as David said, it dwelt "in curtains"; and the joyful utterance of an earlier age will then be quoted by the still happier generation who, at the moment while they sing, see the sacred symbol of the Divine Presence enshrined within the Holy Place of the Temple. At all events, the petitions which follow are most naturally regarded as chanted forth at that supreme moment, though it is possible that the same feeling of the solidity of the nation in all generations, which, as

applied to the reigning family, is seen in ver. 1, may account for the worshippers in the new Temple identifying themselves with the earlier ones who brought up the Ark to Zion. The Church remains the same, while its individual members change.

The first of the petitions is partly taken from the invocation in Numb. x. 35, when "the Ark set forward"; but there it was a prayer for guidance on the march; here, for Jehovah's continuance in His fixed abode. It had wandered far and long. It had been planted in Shiloh, but had deserted that sanctuary which He had once loved. It had tarried for a while at Mizpeh and at Bethel. It had been lost on the field of Aphek, been borne in triumph through Philistine cities, and sent back thence in terror. It had lain for three months in the house of Obed-edom, and for twenty years been hidden at Kirjath-jearim. It had been set with glad acclaim in the tabernacle provided by David, and now it stands in the Temple. There may it abide and go no more out! Solomon and Hiram and all their workmen may have done their best, and the result of their toils may stand gleaming in the sunlight in its fresh beauty; but something more is needed. Not till the Ark is in the Shrine does the Glory fill the house. The lesson is for all ages. Our organisations and works are incomplete without that quickening Presence. It will surely be given if we desire it. When His Church prays, "Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the Ark of Thy strength," His answer is swift and sure, "Lo, I am with you always."

From this petition all the others flow. If "the Ark of Thy strength" dwells with us, we too shall be strong, and have that Might for our inspiration as well as our shield. "Let Thy priests be clothed with

righteousness." The pure vestments of the priests were symbols of stainless character, befitting the ministers of a holy God. The psalmist prays that the symbol may truly represent the inner reality. He distinguishes between priests and the mass of the people; but in the Church to-day, as indeed in the original constitution of Israel, all are priests, and must be clothed in a righteousness which they receive from above. They do not weave that robe, but they must "put on" the garment which Christ gives them. Righteousness is no hazy, theological virtue, having little to do with every-day life and small resemblance to secular morality. To be good, gentle, and just, self-forgetting and self-ruling, to practise the virtues which all men call "lovely and of good report," and to consecrate them all by reference to Him in whom they dwell united and complete, is to be righteous; and that righteousness is the garb required of, and given by God to, all those who seek it and minister in His Temple.

"Let Thy favoured ones utter shrill cries of joy." Surely, if they dwell in the Temple, gladness will not fail them. True religion is joyful. If a man has only to lift his eyes to see the Ark, what but averted eyes should make him sad? True, there are enemies, but we are close to the fountain of strength. True, there are sins, but we can receive the garment of righteousness. True, there are wants, but the sacrifice whereof "the meek shall eat and be satisfied" is at hand. There is much unreached as yet, but there is a present God. So we may "walk all the day in the light of His countenance," and realise the truth of the paradox of always rejoicing, though sometimes we sorrow.

The final petition is for the anointed king, that his

prayers may be heard. To "turn away the face" is a graphic expression, drawn from the attitude of one who refuses to listen to a suppliant. It is harsh in the extreme to suppose that the king referred to is David himself, though Hupfeld and others take that view. The reference to Solomon is natural.

Such are the psalmist's petitions. The answers follow in the remainder of the psalm, which, as already noticed, is parted in two by an interjected verse (ver. 13), breaking the continuity of the Divine Voice. The shape of the responses is determined by the form of the desires, and in every case the answer is larger than the prayer. The Divine utterance begins with a parallel between the oath of David and that of God. David "sware to Jehovah." Yes, but "Jehovah has sworn to David." That is grander and deeper. With this may be connected the similar parallel in vv. 13 and 14 with ver. 5. David had sought to "find a habitation" for Jehovah. But He Himself had chosen His habitation long ago. He is throned there now, not because of David's choice or Solomon's work, but because His will had settled the place of His feet. These correspondences of expression point to the great truth that God is His own all-sufficient reason. He is not won to dwell with men by their importunity, but in the depths of His unchangeable love lies the reason why He abides with us unthankful. The promise given in ver. 12, which has respect to the closing petition of the preceding part, is substantially that contained in 2 Sam. vii. Similar references to that fundamental promise to David are found in Psalm lxxxix., with which this psalm is sometimes taken to be parallel; but that psalm comes from a time when the faithful promise seemed to have failed for evermore, and

their true selves to the declared will of God! Their sorrow appeals to God's heart, and is blessed if it dictates the prayer for His quickening (ver. 25). Their cleaving to His law warrants their hope that He will not put them to shame.

The first pair of verses in which "way" is the acrostic word (vv. 26, 27) sets "my ways" over against "the way of Thy precepts." The psalmist has made God his confidant, telling Him all his life's story, and has found continual answers, in gifts of mercy and inward whispers. He asks, therefore, for further illumination, which will be in accordance with these past mutual communications. Tell God thy ways and He will teach thee His statutes. The franker our confession, the more fervent our longing for fuller knowledge of His will. "The way of Thy precepts" is the practical life according to these, the ideal which shall rebuke and transform "my ways." The singer's crooked course is spread before God, and he longs to see clearly the straight path of duty, on which he vows that he will meditate, and find wonders in the revelation of God's will. Many a sunbeam is wasted for want of intent eyes. The prayer for understanding is vain without the vow of pondering. The next pair of "way-" verses (vv. 29, 30) contrasts ways of "lying" and of "faithfulness"—*i.e.*, sinful life which is false towards God and erroneous in its foundation maxims, and life which is true in practice to Him and to man's obligations. The psalmist prays that the former may be put far from him; for he feels that it is only too near, and his unhelped feet too ready to enter on it. He recognises the inmost meaning of the Law as an outcome of God's favour. It is not harsh, but glowing with love, God's best gift. The prayer in ver. 29 has

of power. It shall continually "sprout"—*i.e.*, the might of the royal house shall continually increase. The "lamp for Mine anointed" may be simply a metaphor for enduring prosperity and happiness, but many expositors take it to be a symbol of the continuance of the Davidic house, as in 1 Kings xv. 4, where, however, the word employed is not the same as that used here, though closely connected with it. The promise of perpetuity to the house of David does not fit into the context as well as that of splendour and joy, and it has already been given in ver. 12. Victory will attend the living representative of David, his foes being clothed by Jehovah with shame—*i.e.*, being foiled in their hostile attempts—while their confusion is as a dark background, against which the radiance of his diadem sparkles the more brightly. These large promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, of the seed of David; and the psalm is Messianic, as presenting the ideal which it is sure shall be realised, and which is so in Him alone.

The Divine promises teach the great truth that God over-answers our desires, and puts to shame the poverty of our petitions by the wealth of His gifts. He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," for the measure of His doing is none other than "according to the Power that worketh in us," and the measure of that Power is none other than "the working of the strength of His might, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places."

PSALM CXXXIII.

1 Behold, how good and how pleasant [it is]
That brethren dwell in unity!
2 Like the precious oil on the head,
Flowing down on the beard,
[Even] Aaron's beard,
That flows down on the opening of his garments.
3 Like the dew of Hermon, that flows down on the mountains of Zion.
For there Jehovah has commanded the blessing,
Life for evermore.

IT is natural to suppose that this psalm was occasioned by, or at least refers to, the gathering of the pilgrims or restored exiles in Jerusalem. The patriot-poet's heart glows at the sight of the assembled multitudes, and he points with exultation to the good and fair sight. Like the other short psalms in this group, this one is the expression of a single thought—the blessing of unity, and that not merely as shown in the family, but in the church-state of the restored Israel. The remembrance of years of scattering among the nations, and of the schism of the Northern tribes, makes the sight of an united Israel the more blessed, even though its numbers are small.

The psalm begins with a "Behold," as if the poet would summon others to look on the goodly spectacle which, in reality or in imagination, is spread before him. Israel is gathered together, and the sight is good,

as securing substantial benefits, and "pleasant," as being lovely. The original in ver. 1 *b* runs, "That brethren dwell *also* together." The "also" suggests that, in addition to local union, there should be heart harmony, as befits brothers. To speak in modern dialect, the psalmist cares little for external unity, if the spirit of oneness does not animate the corporate whole.

His two lovely metaphors or parables set forth the same thought—namely, the all-diffusive, all-blessing nature of such inward concord. The repetition in both figures of the same word, "flows down," is not merely due to the "step-like" structure common to this with other of the pilgrim psalms, but is the key to its meaning.

In the first emblem, the consecrating oil, poured on Aaron's head, represents the gracious spirit of concord between brethren. The emblem is felicitous by reason of the preciousness, the fragrance, and the manifold uses of oil; but these are only to be taken into account in a subordinate degree, if at all. The one point of comparison is the flow of the oil from the priestly head on to the beard and thence to the garments. It is doubtful whether ver. 2 *d* refers to the oil or to the beard of the high priest. The latter reference is preferred by many, but the former is more accordant with the parallelism, and with the use of the word "flows down," which can scarcely be twice used in regard to oil and dew, the main subjects in the figures, and be taken in an entirely different reference in the intervening clause. The "opening" (lit. *mouth*) of the robe is the upper edge or collar, the aperture through which the wearer's head was passed.

The second figure illustrates the same thought of

the diffusive blessing of concord, but it presents some difficulty. How can the dew of Hermon in the far north fall on the mountains of Zion? Some commentators, as Delitzsch, try to make out that "an abundant dew in Jerusalem might rightly be accounted for by the influence of the cold current of air sweeping down from the north over Hermon." But that is a violent supposition; and there is no need to demand meteorological accuracy from a poet. It is the one dew which falls on both mountains; and since Hermon towers high above the lower height of Zion, and is visited with singular abundance of the nightly blessing, it is no inadmissible poetic licence to say that the loftier hill transmits it to the lesser. Such community of blessing is the result of fraternal concord, whereby the high serve the lowly, and no man grudgingly keeps anything to himself, but all share in the good of each. Dew, like oil, is fitted for this symbolic use, by reason of qualities which, though they do not come prominently into view, need not be wholly excluded. It refreshes the thirsty ground and quickens vegetation; so fraternal concord, falling gently on men's spirits, and linking distant ones together by a mysterious chain of transmitted good, will help to revive failing strength and refresh parched places.

That brotherly unity is blessed, not only because it diffuses itself, and so blesses all in whose hearts it dwells, but also because it is the condition on which still higher gifts are spread among brethren by their brethren's mediation. God Himself pours on men the sacred anointing of His Divine Spirit and the dew of His quickening influences. When His servants are knit together, as they should be, they impart to one another the spiritual gifts received from above. When

Christians are truly one as brethren, God's grace will fructify through each to all.

Ver. 3 *b*, *c*, seem to assign the reason why the dew of Hermon will descend on Zion—*i.e.*, why the blessings of brotherly concord should there especially be realised. There God has appointed to be stored His blessing of life ; therefore it becomes those who, dwelling there, receive that blessing, to be knit together in closest bonds, and to impart to their brethren what they receive from the Fountain of all good. That Zion should not be the home of concord, or that Jerusalem should not be the city of peace, contradicts both the name of the city and the priceless gift which Jehovah has placed there for all its citizens.

PSALM CXXXIV.

1 Behold, bless Jehovah, all ye servants of Jehovah,
Who stand in the house of Jehovah in the night seasons.
2 Lift up your hands to the sanctuary,
And bless Jehovah.

3 Jehovah bless thee out of Zion,
The Maker of heaven and earth!

THIS fragment of song closes the pilgrim psalms after the manner of a blessing. It is evidently antiphonal, vv. 1, 2, being a greeting, the givers of which are answered in ver. 4 by a corresponding salutation from the receivers. Who are the parties to the little dialogue is doubtful. Some have thought of two companies of priestly watchers meeting as they went their rounds in the Temple; others, more probably, take vv. 1, 2, to be addressed by the congregation to the priests, who had charge of the nightly service in the Temple, while ver. 3 is the response of the latter, addressed to the speakers of vv. 1, 2. 1 Chron. ix. 33 informs us that there was such a nightly service, of the nature of which, however, nothing is known. The designation "servants of Jehovah" here denotes not the people, but the priests, for whose official ministrations "stand" is a common term. They are exhorted to fill the night with prayer as well as watchfulness, and to let their hearts go up in blessing to Jehovah. The voice of praise should echo

through the silent night and float over the sleeping city. The congregation is about to leave the crowded courts at the close of a day of worship, and now gives this parting salutation and charge to those who remain.

The answer in ver. 3 is addressed to each individual of the congregation—"Jehovah bless *thee!*" and it invokes on each a share in the blessing which, according to the preceding psalm, "Jehovah has commanded" in Zion. The watchers who remain in the sanctuary do not monopolise its blessings. These stream out by night, as by day, to all true hearts; and they are guaranteed by the creative omnipotence of Jehovah, the thought of which recurs so often in these pilgrim psalms, and may be due to the revulsion from idolatry consequent on the Captivity and Restoration.

With this sweet interchange of greeting and exhortation to continual worship, this group of psalms joyously ends.

PSALM CXXXV.

Hallelujah!

Praise the name of Jehovah,
Praise, ye servants of Jehovah,
2 Who stand in the house of Jehovah,
In the courts of the house of our God.
3 Praise Jah, for Jehovah is goŏd;
Harp to His name, for it is pleasant.
4 For Jah has chosen Jacob for Himself,
Israel for His own possession.

5 For I—I know that Jehovah is great,
And [that] our Lord is above all gods.
6 Whatsoever Jehovah wills He has done,
In the heaven and in the earth,
In the seas and all depths;
7 Who makes the vapours go up from the end of the earth,
He makes lightnings for the rain,
Who brings forth wind from His storehouses.

8 Who smote the first-born of Egypt,
Both of man and of cattle;
9 He sent signs and wonders into thy midst, O Egypt,
On Pharaoh and all his servants.

10 Who smote many nations,
And slew mighty kings;
11 Sihon, king of the Amorites,
And Og, king of Bashan;
12 And gave their land [as] an inheritance,
An inheritance to Israel His people.

13 Jehovah, Thy name [endures] for ever,
Jehovah, Thy memorial [endures] to generation after generation.
14 For Jehovah will right His people,
And will relent concerning His servants.

15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
The work of the hands of men.
16 A mouth is theirs—and they cannot speak;
Eyes are theirs—and they cannot see;
17 Ears are theirs—and they cannot give ear;
Yea, there is no breath at all in their mouths.
18 Like them shall those who make them be,
[Even] every one that trusts in them.

19 House of Israel, bless ye Jehovah;
House of Aaron, bless ye Jehovah;
20 House of Levi, bless ye Jehovah;
Ye who fear Jehovah, bless ye Jehovah.
21 Blessed be Jehovah from Zion,
Who dwells in Jerusalem!
Hallĕlujah!

LIKE Psalms xcvii. and xcviii., this is a cento, or piece of mosaic work, apparently intended as a call to worship Jehovah in the Temple. His greatness, as manifested in Nature, and especially in His planting Israel in its inheritance, is set forth as the reason for praise; and the contemptuous contrast of the nothingness of idols is repeated from Psalm cxv., and followed, as there, by an exhortation to Israel to cleave to Him. We have not here to do with a song which gushed fresh from the singer's heart, but with echoes of many strains which a devout and meditative soul had made its own. The flowers are arranged in a new bouquet, because the poet had long delighted in their fragrance. The ease with which he blends into a harmonious whole fragments from such diverse sources tells how familiar he was with these, and how well he loved them.

Vv. 1–4 are an invocation to praise Jehovah, and largely consist of quotations or allusions. Thus Psalm cxxxiv. 1 underlies vv. 1, 2. But here the reference to nightly praises is omitted, and the summons is

addressed not only to those who stand in the house of Jehovah, but to those who stand in its *courts*. That expansion may mean that the call to worship is here directed to the people as well as to the priests (so in ver. 19). Ver. 3 closely resembles Psalm cxlvii. 1, but the question of priority may be left undecided. Since the act of praise is said to be "pleasant" in Psalm cxlvii. 1, it is best to refer the same word here to the same thing, and not, as some would do, to the Name, or to take it as an epithet of Jehovah. To a loving soul praise is a delight. The songs which are not winged by the singer's joy in singing will not rise high. True worship pours out its notes as birds do theirs—in order to express gladness which, unuttered, loads the heart. Ver. 4 somewhat passes beyond the bounds of the invocation proper, and anticipates the subsequent part of the psalm. Israel's prerogative is so great to this singer that it forces utterance at once, though "out of season," as correct critics would say. But the throbs of a grateful heart are not always regular. It is impossible to keep the reasons for praise out of the summons to praise. Ver. 4 joyfully and humbly accepts the wonderful title given in Deut. vii. 6.

In vv. 5–7 God's majesty as set forth in Nature is hymned. The psalmist says emphatically in ver. 5 "I—I know," and implies the privilege which he shared, in common with his fellow-Israelites (who appear in the "our" of the next clause), of knowing what the heathen did not know—how highly Jehovah was exalted above all their gods. Ver. 6 is from Psalm cxv. 3, with the expansion of defining the all-inclusive sphere of God's sovereignty. Heaven, earth, seas, and depths cover all space. The enumeration of the provinces of His

dominion prepares for that of the phases of His power in Nature, which is quoted with slight change from Jer. x. 13, li. 16. The mysterious might which gathers from some unknown region the filmy clouds which grow, no man knows how, in the clear blue; the power which weds in strange companionship the fire of the lightning flash and the torrents of rain; the controlling hand which urges forth the invisible wind,—these call for praise.

But while the psalmist looks on physical phenomena with a devout poet's eye, he turns from these to expatiate rather on what Jehovah has done for Israel. Psalmists are never weary of drawing confidence and courage for to-day from the deeds of the Exodus and the Conquest. Ver. 8 is copied from Exod. xiii. 15, and the whole section is saturated with phraseology drawn from Deuteronomy. Ver. 13 is from Exod. iii. 15, the narrative of the theophany at the Bush. That Name, proclaimed then as the basis of Moses' mission and Israel's hope, is now, after so many centuries and sorrows, the same, and it will endure for ever. Ver. 14 is from Deut. xxxii. 36. Jehovah will right His people—*i.e.*, deliver them from oppressors—which is the same thing as "relent concerning His servants," since His wrath was the reason of their subjection to their foes. That judicial deliverance of Israel is at once the sign that His Name, His revealed character, continues the same, unexhausted and unchanged for ever, and the reason why the Name shall continue as the object of perpetual adoration and trust.

Vv. 15–20 are taken bodily from Psalm cxv., to which the reader is referred. Slight abbreviations and one notable difference occur. In ver. 17 *b*, "Yea, there is no breath at all in their mouths," takes the place

of "A nose is theirs—and they cannot smell." The variation has arisen from the fact that the particle of strong affirmation (yea) is spelt like the noun "nose," and that the word for "breath" resembles the verb "smell." The psalmist plays upon his original, and by his variation makes the expression of the idols' lifelessness stronger.

The final summons to praise, with which the end of the psalm returns to its beginning, is also moulded on Psalm cxv. 9–11, with the addition of "the house of Levi" to the three groups mentioned there, and the substitution of a call to "bless" for the original invitation to "trust." Ver. 21 looks back to the last verse of the preceding psalm, and significantly modifies it. There, as in Psalm cxviii., Jehovah's blessing comes out of Zion to His people. Here the people's blessing in return goes from Zion and rises to Jehovah. They gathered there for worship, and dwelt with Him in His city and Temple. Swift interchange of the God-given blessing, which consists in mercies and gifts of gracious deliverance, and of the human blessing, which consists in thanksgiving and praise, fills the hours of those who dwell with Jehovah, as guests in His house, and walk the streets of the city which He guards and Himself inhabits.

PSALM CXXXVI.

1 Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.
2 Give thanks to the God of gods,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever,
3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.

4 To Him who alone does great wonders,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.
5 To Him who made the heavens by understanding,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.
6 To Him who spread the earth above the waters,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.
7 To Him who made great lights,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
8 The sun to rule by day,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
9 The moon and stars to rule by night,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.

10 To Him who smote the Egyptians in their first-born,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
11 And brought forth Israel from their midst,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
12 With mighty strong hand and outstretched arm,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.
13 To Him that cut the Red Sea into parts,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
14 And made Israel pass through the midst of it,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
15 And shook out Pharaoh and his host into the Red Sea,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.

16 To Him who led His people in the wilderness,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.

17 To Him who smote great kings,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
18 And slew mighty kings,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
19 Sihon, king of the Amorites,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
20 And Og, king of Bashan,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
21 And gave their land for an inheritance,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
22 An inheritance to Israel His servant,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.

23 Who in our low estate remembered us,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever;
24 And tore us from the grasp of our adversaries,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.
25 Who gives bread to all flesh,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.
26 Give thanks to the God of heaven,
For His loving-kindness endures for ever.

THIS psalm is evidently intended for liturgic use. It contains reminiscences of many parts of Scripture, and is especially based on the previous psalm, which it follows closely in vv. 10–18, and quotes directly in vv. 19–22. Delitzsch points out that if these quoted verses are omitted, the psalm falls into triplets. It would then also contain twenty-two verses, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The general trend of thought is like that of Psalm cxxxv.; but the addition in each verse of the refrain gives a noble swing and force to this exulting song.

The first triplet is a general invocation to praise, coloured by the phraseology of Deuteronomy. Vv. 2 *a* and 3 *a* quote Deut. x. 17. The second and third triplets (vv. 4–9) celebrate Jehovah's creative power. "Doeth great wonders" (ver. 4) is from Psalm lxxii. 18.

The thought of the Divine Wisdom as the creative agent occurs in Psalm civ. 24, and attains noble expression in Prov. iii. In ver. 6 the word rendered *spread* is from the same root as that rendered "firmament" in Genesis. The office of the heavenly bodies to rule day and night is taken from Gen. i. But the psalm looks at the story of Creation from an original point of view, when it rolls out in chorus, after each stage of that work, that its motive lay in the eternal loving-kindness of Jehovah. Creation is an act of Divine love. That is the deepest truth concerning all things visible. They are the witnesses, as they are the result, of loving-kindness which endures for ever.

Vv. 10–22 pass from world-wide manifestations of that creative loving-kindness to those specially affecting Israel. If vv. 19–22 are left out of notice, there are three triplets in which the Exodus, desert life, and conquest of Caanan are the themes,—the first (vv. 10–12) recounting the departure; the second (vv. 13–15) the passage of the Red Sea; the third (vv. 16–18) the guidance during the forty years and the victories over enemies. The whole is largely taken from the preceding psalm, and has also numerous allusions to other parts of Scripture. Ver. 12*a* is found in Deut. iv. 34, etc. The word for dividing the Red Sea is peculiar. It means to hew in pieces or in two, and is used for cutting in halves the child in Solomon's judgment (1 Kings iii. 25); while the word "parts" is a noun from the same root, and is found in Gen. xv. 17, to describe the two portions into which Abraham clave the carcasses. Thus, as with a sword, Jehovah hewed the sea in two, and His people passed between the parts, as between the halves of the covenant sacrifice. In ver. 15 the word describing Pharaoh's destruction

is taken from Exod. xiv. 27, and vividly describes it as a "shaking out," as one would vermin or filth from a robe.

In the last triplet (vv. 23–25) the singer comes to the Israel of the present. It, too, had experienced Jehovah's remembrance in its time of need, and felt the merciful grasp of His hand plucking it, with loving violence, from the claws of the lion. The word for "low estate" and that for "tore us from the grasp" are only found besides in late writings—the former in Eccles. x. 6, and the latter in Lam. v. 8.

But the song will not close with reference only to Israel's blessings. "He gives bread to all flesh." The loving-kindness which flashes forth even in destructive acts, and is manifested especially in bringing Israel back from exile, stretches as wide in its beneficence as it did in its first creative acts, and sustains all flesh which it has made. Therefore the final call to praise, which rounds off the psalm by echoing its beginning, does not name Him by the Name which implied Israel's special relation, but by that by which other peoples could and did address Him, "the God of heaven," from whom all good comes down on all the earth.

PSALM CXXXVII.

1 By the streams of Babylon, there we sat, yea, wept,
When we remembered Zion.
2 On the willows in the midst thereof
We hung our harps.
3 For there our captors required of us words of song,
And our plunderers [required of us] mirth;
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."
4 How can we sing Jehovah's songs
In a strange land?

5 If I forget thee, Jerusalem,
May my right hand forget!
6 May my tongue cleave to my palate,
If I remember thee not,
If I set not Jerusalem
Above the summit of my joy!

7 Remember, Jehovah, to the children of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, "Lay bare, lay bare,
To the foundation therein."
8 Daughter of Babylon, thou that art laid waste,
Happy he that requites thee
Thy doing which thou hast done to us!
9 Happy he that seizes and dashes thy little ones
Against the rock!

THE Captivity is past, as the tenses in vv. 1–3 show, and as is manifest from the very fact that its miseries have become themes for a psalm. Grief must be somewhat removed before it can be sung. But the strains of triumph heard in other psalms are wanting in this, which breathes passionate love for Jerusalem,

tinged with sadness still. The date of the psalm is apparently the early days of the Return, when true-hearted patriots still felt the smart of recent bondage and sadly gazed on the dear ruins of the city. The singer passes in brief compass from tender music breathing plaintive remembrance of the captives' lot, to passionate devotion, and at last to an outburst of vehement imprecation, magnificent in its fiery rush, amply explicable by Israel's wrongs and Babylon's crimes, and yet to be frankly acknowledged as moving on a lower plane of sentiment than is permissible to those who have learned to repay scorn with gentleness, hate with love, and injuries with desires for the injurer's highest good. The coals of fire which this psalmist scatters among Israel's foes are not those which Christ's servants are bidden to heap on their enemies' heads.

Nothing sweeter or sadder was ever written than that delicate, deeply felt picture of the exiles in the early verses of the psalm. We see them sitting, as too heavy-hearted for activity, and half noting, as adding to their grief, the unfamiliar landscape round them, with its innumerable canals, and the monotonous "willows" (rather, a species of poplar) stretching along their banks. How unlike this flat, tame fertility to the dear home-land, with its hills and glens and rushing streams! The psalmist was probably a Temple singer, but he did not find solace even in "the harp, his sole remaining joy." No doubt many of the exiles made themselves at home in captivity, but there were some more keenly sensitive or more devout, who found that it was better to remember Zion and weep than to enjoy Babylon. "Alas, alas! how much less it is to hold converse with others than to remember thee!" So they sat, like Michael Angelo's brooding figure of

Jeremiah in the Sistine Chapel, silent, motionless, lost in bitter-sweet memories.

But there was another reason than their own sadness for hanging their idle harps upon the willows. Their coarse oppressors bade them sing to make mirth. They wished entertainment from the odd sounds of foreign music, or they were petulantly angry that such dumb hang-dog people should keep sullen faces, like unilluminated windows, when their masters were pleased to be merry. So, like tipsy revellers, they called out "Sing!" The request drove the iron deeper into sad hearts, for it came from those who had made the misery. They had led away the captives, and now they bid them make sport.

The word rendered *plunderers* is difficult. The translation adopted here is that of the LXX. and others. It requires a slight alteration of reading, which is approved by Hupfeld (as an alternative), Perowne, Baethgen, Graetz, etc. Cheyne follows Halevy in preferring another conjectural alteration which gives "dancers" ("and of our dancers, festive glee"), but admits that the other view is "somewhat more natural." The roystering Babylonians did not care what kind of songs their slaves sang—Temple music would do as well as any other; but the devout psalmist and his fellows shrank from profaning the sacred songs that praised Jehovah by making them parts of a heathen banquet. Such sacrilege would have been like Belshazzar's using the Temple vessels for his orgy. "Give not that which is holy to dogs." And the singers were not influenced by superstition, but by reverence and by sadness, when they could not sing these songs in that strange land. No doubt it was a fact that the Temple music fell into desuetude during the Captivity. There are moods

and there are scenes in which it is profanation to utter the deep music which may be sounding on perpetually in the heart. "Songs unheard" are sometimes not only "sweetest," but the truest worship.

The psalmist's remembrances of Babylon are suddenly broken off. His heart burns as he broods on that past, and then lifts his eyes to see how forlorn and forgotten-like Jerusalem stands, as if appealing to her sons for help. A rush of emotion sweeps over him, and he breaks into a passion of vowed loyalty to the mother city. He has Jerusalem written on his heart. It is noteworthy that her remembrance *was* the exiles' crown of sorrow; it now becomes the apex of the singer's joy. No private occasion for gladness so moves the depths of a soul, smitten with the noble and ennobling love of the city of God, as does its prosperity. Alas that the so-called citizens of the true city of God should have so tepid interest in its welfare, and be so much more keenly touched by individual than by public prosperity or adversity! Alas that so often they should neither weep when they remember its bondage nor exult in its advancement!

Ver. 5 *b* is emphatic by its incompleteness. "May my right hand forget!" What? Some word like "power," "cunning," or "movement" may be supplied. It would be as impossibly unnatural for the poet to forget Jerusalem as for his hand to forget to move or cease to be conscious of its connection with his body.

Ver. 6 *d* reads literally "Above the head of my joy": an expression which may either mean the summit of my joy—*i.e.*, my greatest joy; or the sum of my joy—*i.e.*, my whole joy. In either case the well-being of Jerusalem is the psalmist's climax of gladness; and so utterly does he lose himself in the community founded

by God, that all his springs of felicity are in her. He had chosen the better part. Unselfish gladness is the only lasting bliss; and only they drink of an unfailing river of pleasures whose chiefest delight lies in beholding and sharing in the rebuilding of God's city on earth.

The lightning flashes of the last part of the psalm need little commenting. The desire for the destruction of Zion's enemies, which they express, is not the highest mood of the loyal citizen of God's city, and is to be fully recognised as not in accordance with Christian morality. But it has been most unfairly judged, as if it were nothing nobler than ferocious thirsting for vengeance. It is a great deal more. It is desire for retribution, heavy as the count of crimes which demands it is heavy. It is a solemn appeal to God to sweep away the enemies of Zion, who, in hating her, rebelled against Him. First, the psalmist turns to the treacherous kinsmen of Israel, the Edomites, who had, as Obadiah says, "rejoiced over the children of Judah in the days of their destruction" (Obad. 12), and stimulated the work of rasing the city. Then the singer turns to Babylon, and salutes her as already laid waste; for he is a seer as well as a singer, and is so sure of the judgment to be accomplished that it is as good as done. The most repellent part of the imprecation, that which contemplates the dreadful destruction of tender infants, has its harshness somewhat softened by the fact that it is the echo of Isaiah's prophecy concerning Babylon (Isa. xiii. 16–18), and still further by the consideration that the purpose of the apparently barbarous cruelty was to make an end of a "seed of evil-doers," whose continuance meant misery for wide lands.

Undoubtedly, the words are stern, and the temper they embody is harsh discord, when compared with the

Christian spirit. But they are not the utterances of mere ferocious revenge. Rather they proclaim God's judgments, not with the impassiveness, indeed, which best befits the executors of such terrible sentences, but still less with the malignant gratification of sanguinary vengeance which has been often attributed to them. Perhaps, if some of their modern critics had been under the yoke from which this psalmist has been delivered, they would have understood a little better how a good man of that age could rejoice that Babylon was fallen and all its race extirpated. Perhaps, it would do modern tender-heartedness no harm to have a little more iron infused into its gentleness, and to lay to heart that the King of Peace must first be King of Righteousness, and that Destruction of evil is the complement of Preservation of Good.

PSALM CXXXVIII.

1 I will thank Thee, Jehovah, with my whole heart,
In presence of the gods will I harp to Thee.
2 I will worship toward Thy holy Temple,
And will thank Thy name for Thy loving-kindness and for Thy truth,
For Thou hast magnified Thy promise above all Thy name.
3 In the day [when] I called Thou answeredst me,
Thou didst make me bold—in my soul [welled up] strength.

4 Jehovah, all the kings of the earth shall thank Thee,
When they have heard the words of Thy mouth.
5 And they shall sing of the ways of Jehovah,
For great is the glory of Jehovah.
6 For Jehovah is high, and the lowly He regards,
And the lofty from afar off He knows.

7 If I walk in the midst of trouble Thou wilt revive me,
Against the wrath of mine enemies Thou wilt stretch forth Thy hand,
And Thy right hand shall save me.
8 Jehovah will complete [all] that concerns me;
Jehovah, Thy loving-kindness [endures] for ever;
The works of Thy hands abandon not.

THIS is the first of a group of eight psalms attributed to David in the superscriptions. It precedes the closing hallelujah psalms, and thus stands where a "find" of Davidic psalms at a late date would naturally be put. In some cases, there is no improbability in the assigned authorship; and this psalm is certainly singularly unlike those which precede it, and

has many affinities with the earlier psalms ascribed to David.

In reading it, one feels the return to familiar thoughts and tones. The fragrance it exhales wakes memories of former songs. But the resemblance may be due to the imitative habit so marked in the last book of the Psalter. If it is a late psalm, the speaker is probably the personified Israel, and the deliverance which seems to the singer to have transcended all previous manifestations of the Divine name is the Restoration, which has inspired so many of the preceding psalms. The supporters of the Davidic authorship, on the other hand, point to the promise to David by Nathan of the perpetuity of the kinghood in his line, as the occasion of the psalmist's triumph.

The structure of the psalm is simple. It falls into three parts, of which the two former consist of three verses each, and the last of two. In the first, the singer vows praise and recounts God's wondrous dealings with him (vv. 1–3); in the second, he looks out over all the earth in the confidence that these blessings, when known, will bring the world to worship (vv. 4–6); and in the third, he pleads for the completion to himself of mercies begun (vv. 7, 8).

The first part is the outpouring of a thankful heart for recent great blessing, which has been the fulfilment of a Divine promise. So absorbed in his blessedness is the singer, that he neither names Jehovah as the object of his thanks, nor specifies what has set his heart vibrating. The great Giver and the great gift are magnified by being unspoken. To whom but Jehovah could the current of the psalmist's praise set? He feels that Jehovah's mercy to him requires him to become the herald of His name; and therefore he vows,

in lofty consciousness of his mission, that he will ring out God's praises in presence of false gods, whose worshippers have no such experience to loose their tongues. Dead gods have dumb devotees; the servants of the living Jehovah receive His acts of power, that they may proclaim His name.

The special occasion for this singer's praise has been some act, in which Jehovah's faithfulness was very conspicuously shown. "Thou hast magnified Thy promise above all Thy name." If the history of David underlies the psalm, it is most natural to interpret the "promise" as that of the establishment of the monarchy. But the fulfilment, not the giving, of a promise is its magnifying, and hence one would incline to take the reference to be to the great manifestation of God's troth in restoring Israel to its land. In any case the expression is peculiar, and has induced many attempts at emendation. Baethgen would strike out "Thy name" as a dittograph from the previous clause, and thus gets the reading "done great things beyond Thy word"—*i.e.*, transcended the promise in fulfilment—which yields a good sense. Others make a slight alteration in the word "Thy name," and read it "Thy heavens," supposing that the psalmist is making the usual comparison between the manifestation of Divine power in Nature and in Revelation, or in the specific promise in question. But the text as it stands, though peculiar, is intelligible, and yields a meaning very appropriate to the singer's astonished thankfulness. A heart amazed by the greatness of recent blessings is ever apt to think that they, glittering in fresh beauty, are greater, as they are nearer and newer, than the mercies which it has only heard of as of old. To-day brings growing revelations of Jehovah to the waiting heart. The psalmist

is singing, not dissertating. It is quite true that if his words are measured by the metaphysical theologian's foot-rule, they are inaccurate, for "the name of God cannot be surpassed by any single act of His, since every single act is but a manifestation of that name"; but thankfulness does not speak by rule, and the psalmist means to say that, so great has been the mercy given to him and so signal its confirmation of the Divine promise, that to him, at all events, that whole name blazes with new lustre, and breathes a deeper music. So should each man's experience be the best teacher of what God is to all men.

In ver. 3 *b* the psalmist uses a remarkable expression, in saying that Jehovah had made him bold, or, as the word is literally, *proud*. The following words are a circumstantial or subsidiary clause, and indicate how the consciousness of inbreathed strength welling up in his soul gave him lofty confidence to confront foes.

The second part (vv. 4–6) resembles many earlier psalms in connecting the singer's deliverance with a world-wide manifestation of God's name. Such a consciousness of a vocation to be the world's evangelist is appropriate either to David or the collective Israel. Especially is it natural, and, as a fact, occurs in post-exilic psalms. Here "the words of Thy mouth" are equivalent to the promise already spoken of, the fulfilment of which has shown that Jehovah the High has regard to the lowly—*i.e.*, to the psalmist; and "knows the lofty"—*i.e.*, his oppressors—"afar off." He reads their characters thoroughly, without, as it were, needing to approach for minute study. The implication is that He will thwart their plans and judge the plotters. This great lesson of Jehovah's providence, care for the lowly, faithfulness to His word, has exemplification

in the psalmist's history; and when it is known, the lofty ones of the earth shall learn the principles of Jehovah's ways, and become lowly recipients of His favours and adoring singers of His great glory.

The glowing vision is not yet fulfilled; but the singer was cherishing no illusions when he sang. It *is* true that the story of God's great manifestation of Himself in Christ, in which He has magnified His Word above all His name, is one day to win the world. It *is* true that the revelation of a God who regards the lowly is the conquering Gospel which shall bow all hearts.

In the third part (vv. 7, 8), the psalmist comes back to his own needs, and takes to his heart the calming assurance born of his experience, that he bears a charmed life. He but speaks the confidence which should strengthen every heart that rests on God. Such an one may be girdled about by troubles, but he will have an inner circle traced round him, within which no evil can venture. He may walk in the valley of the shadow of death unfearing, for God will hold his soul in life. Foes may pour out floods of enmity and wrath, but one strong hand will be stretched out against (or *over*) the wild deluge, and will draw the trustful soul out of its rush on to the safe shore. So was the psalmist assured; so may and should those be who have yet greater wonders for which to thank Jehovah.

That last prayer of the psalm blends very beautifully confidence and petition. Its central clause is the basis of both the confidence in its first, and the petition in its last, clause. Because Jehovah's loving-kindness endures for ever, every man on whom His shaping Spirit has begun to work, or His grace in any form to bestow its gifts, may be sure that no exhaustion or

change of these is possible. God is not as the foolish tower-builder, who began and was not able to finish. He never stops till He has completed His work; and nothing short of the entire conformity of a soul to His likeness and the filling of it with Himself can be the termination of His loving purpose, or of His achieving grace. Therefore the psalmist "found it in his heart to pray" that God would not abandon the works of His own hands. That prayer appeals to His faithfulness and to His honour. It sets forth the obligations under which God comes by what He has done. It is a prayer which goes straight to His heart; and they who offer it receive the old answer, "I will not leave thee till I have done unto thee that which I have spoken to thee of."

PSALM CXXXIX.

1 Jehovah, Thou hast searched me and known [me].
2 Thou, Thou knowest my down-sitting and my up-rising,
Thou understandest my thought afar off.
3 My walking and my lying down Thou siftest,
And with all my ways Thou art familiar.
4 For there is not a word on my tongue,
—Behold, Thou, Jehovah, knowest it all.
5 Behind and before Thou hast shut me in,
And hast laid upon me Thy hand.
6 [Such] knowledge is too wonderful for me,
Too high, I am not able for it.

7 Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?
And whither from Thy face shall I flee?
8 If I climb heaven, there art Thou,
Or make Sheol my bed, lo, Thou [art there].
9 [If] I lift up the wings of the dawn,
[If] I dwell at the farthest end of the sea,
10 Even there Thy hand shall lead me,
And Thy right hand shall hold me.
11 And [if] I say, "Only let darkness cover me,
And the light about me be [as] night,"
12 Even darkness darkens not to Thee,
And night lightens like day;
As is the darkness, so is the light.

13 For Thou, Thou hast formed my reins,
Thou hast woven me together in my mother's womb.
14 I will thank Thee for that in dread fashion I am wondrously made
Wondrous are Thy works,
And my soul knows [it] well.
15 My bones were not hid from Thee,
When I was made in secret,
[And] wrought like embroidery [as] in the depths of the earth.

16 Thine eyes saw my shapeless mass,
And in Thy book were they all written,
The days [that] were fashioned,
And yet there was not one among them.
17 And to me how precious are Thy thoughts, O God,
How great is their sum!
18 Would I reckon them, they outnumber the sand;
I awake—and am still with Thee.

19 Oh, if Thou wouldest smite the wicked, O God!
—And [ye] men of blood, depart from me,
20 Who rebel against Thee with wicked deeds,
They lift up [themselves] against Thee vainly (?)
21 Do not I hate them which hate Thee, Jehovah?
And am not I grieved with those who rise against Thee?
22 With perfect hatred I hate them,
They are counted for enemies to me.
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart,
Try me and know my thoughts,
24 And see if there be any way of grief in me,
And lead me in a way everlasting.

THIS is the noblest utterance in the Psalter of pure contemplative theism, animated and not crushed by the thought of God's omniscience and omnipresence. No less striking than the unequalled force and sublimity with which the psalm hymns the majestic attributes of an all-filling, all-knowing, all-creating God, is the firmness with which the singer's personal relation to that God is grasped. Only in the last verses is there reference to other men. In the earlier parts of the psalm, there are but two beings in the universe—God and the psalmist. With impressive reiteration, God's attributes are gazed on in their bearing on him. Not mere omniscience, but a knowledge which knows *him* altogether, not mere omnipresence, but a presence which *he* can nowhere escape, not mere creative power, but a power which shaped *him*, fill and thrill the psalmist's soul. This is no cold theism, but

vivid religion. Conscience and the consciousness of individual relation to God penetrate and vitalise the whole. Hence the sudden turn to prayer against evil men and for the singer's direction in the right way, which closes the hymn, is natural, however abrupt.

The course of thought is plain. There are four strophes of six verses each,—of which the first (vv. 1–6) magnifies God's omniscience; the second (vv. 7–12), His omnipresence; the third (vv. 13–18), His creative act, as the ground of the preceding attributes; and the fourth (vv. 19–24) recoils from men who rebel against such a God, and joyfully submits to the searching of His omniscient eye, and the guidance of His ever-present hand.

The psalmist is so thoroughly possessed by the thought of his personal relation to God that his meditation spontaneously takes the form of address to Him. That form adds much to the impressiveness, but is no rhetorical or poetic artifice. Rather, it is the shape in which such intense consciousness of God cannot but utter itself. How cold and abstract the awestruck sentences become, if we substitute "He" for "Thou," and "men" for "I" and "me"! The first overwhelming thought of God's relation to the individual soul is that He completely knows the whole man. "Omniscience" is a pompous word, which leaves us unaffected by either awe or conscience. But the psalmist's God was a God who came into close touch with him, and the psalmist's religion translated the powerless generality of an attribute referring to the Divine relation to the universe into a continually exercised power having reference to himself. He utters his reverent consciousness of it in ver. 1 in a single clause, and expands that verse in the succeeding ones. "Thou hast searched

me" describes a process of minute investigation; "and known [me]," its result in complete knowledge.

That knowledge is then followed out in various directions, and recognised as embracing the whole man in all his modes of action and repose, in all his inner and outward life. Vv. 2 and 3 are substantially parallel. "Down-sitting" and "up-rising" correspond to "walking" and "lying down," and both antitheses express the contrast between action and rest. "My thought" in ver. 2 corresponds to "my ways" in ver. 3,—the former referring to the inner life of thought, purpose, and will; the latter to the outward activities which carry these into effect. Ver. 3 is a climax to ver. 2, in so far as it ascribes a yet closer and more accurate knowledge to God. "Thou siftest" or *winnowest* gives a picturesque metaphor for careful and judicial scrutiny which discerns wheat from chaff. "Thou art familiar" implies intimate and habitual knowledge. But thought and action are not the whole man. The power of speech, which the Psalter always treats as solemn and a special object of Divine approval or condemnation, must also be taken into account. Ver. 4 brings it, too, under God's cognisance. The meaning may either be that "There is no word on my tongue [which] Thou dost not know altogether"; or, "The word is not yet on my tongue, [but] lo! Thou knowest," etc. "Before it has shaped itself on the tongue, [much less been launched from it], thou knowest all its secret history" (Kay).

The thought that God knows him through and through blends in the singer's mind with the other, that God surrounds him on every side. Ver. 5 thus anticipates the thought of the next strophe, but presents it rather as the basis of God's knowledge, and as limit-

ing man's freedom. But the psalmist does not feel that he is imprisoned, or that the hand laid on him is heavy. Rather, he rejoices in the defence of an encompassing God, who shuts off evil from him, as well as shuts him in from self-willed and self-determined action; and he is glad to be held by a hand so gentle as well as strong. "Thou God seest me" may either be a dread or a blessed thought. It may paralyse or stimulate. It should be the ally of conscience, and, while it stirs to all noble deeds, should also emancipate from all slavish fear. An exclamation of reverent wonder and confession of the limitation of human comprehension closes the strophe.

Why should the thought that God is ever with the psalmist be put in the shape of vivid pictures of the impossibility of escape from Him? It is the sense of sin which leads men to hide from God, like Adam among the trees of the garden. The psalmist does not desire thus to flee, but he supposes the case, which would be only too common if men realised God's knowledge of all their ways. He imagines himself reaching the extremities of the universe in vain flight, and stunned by finding God there. The utmost possible height is coupled with the utmost possible depth. Heaven and Sheol equally fail to give refuge from that moveless Face, which confronts the fugitive in both, and fills them as it fills all the intervening dim distances. The dawn flushes the east, and swiftly passes on roseate wings to the farthest bounds of the Mediterranean, which, to the psalmist, represented the extreme west, a land of mystery. In both places and in all the broad lands between, the fugitive would find himself in the grasp of the same hand (compare ver. 5).

Darkness is the friend of fugitives from men; but is transparent to God. In ver. 11 the language is somewhat obscure. The word rendered above "cover" is doubtful, as the Hebrew text reads "bruise," which is quite unsuitable here. Probably there has been textual error, and the slight correction which yields the above sense is to be adopted, as by many moderns. The second clause of the verse carries on the supposition of the first, and is not to be regarded, as in the A.V., as stating the result of the supposition, or, in grammatical language, the apodosis. That begins with ver. 12, and is marked there, as in ver. 10, by "even."

The third strophe (vv. 13–18) grounds the psalmist's relation to God on God's creative act. The mysteries of conception and birth naturally struck the imagination of non-scientific man, and are to the psalmist the direct result of Divine power. He touches them with poetic delicacy and devout awe, casting a veil of metaphor over the mystery, and losing sight of human parents in the clear vision of the Divine Creator. There is room for his thought of the origin of the individual life, behind modern knowledge of embryology. In ver. 13 the word rendered in the A.V. "possessed" is better understood in this context as meaning "formed," and that rendered there "covered" (as in Psalm cxl. 7) here means to *plait* or *weave together*, and picturesquely describes the interlacing bones and sinews, as in Job x. 11. But description passes into adoration in ver. 14. Its language is somewhat obscure. The verb rendered "wondrously made" probably means here "selected" or "distinguished," and represents man as the *chef d'œuvre* of the Divine Artificer. The psalmist cannot contemplate his own frame, God's workmanship, without breaking into thanks, nor without being touched

with awe. Every man carries in his own body reasons enough for reverent gratitude.

The word for "bones" in ver. 15 is a collective noun, and might be rendered "bony framework." The mysterious receptacle in which the unborn body takes shape and grows is delicately described as "secret," and likened to the hidden region of the underworld, where are the dead. The point of comparison is the mystery enwrapping both. The same comparison occurs in Job's pathetic words, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." It is doubtful whether the word rendered above "wrought like embroidery" refers to a pattern wrought by weaving or by needlework. In any case, it describes "the variegated colour of the individual members, especially of the viscera" (Delitzsch). The mysteries of antenatal being are still pursued in ver. 16, which is extremely obscure. It is, however, plain that *a* sets forth the Divine knowledge of man in his first rudiments of corporeity. "My shapeless mass" is one word, meaning anything rolled up in a bundle or ball. But in *b* it is doubtful what is referred to in "they all." Strictly, the word should point back to something previously mentioned; and hence the A.V. and R.V. suppose that the "shapeless mass" is thought of as resolved into its component parts, and insert "my members"; but it is better to recognise a slight irregularity here, and to refer the word to the "days" immediately spoken of, which existed in the Divine foreknowledge long before they had real objective existence in the actual world. The last clause of the verse is capable of two different meanings, according as the Hebrew text or margin is followed. This is one of a number of cases in which there is a doubt whether we should

ad "not" or "to him" (or "it"). The Hebrew ords having these meanings are each of two letters, e initial one being the same in both, and both words ving the same sound. Confusion might easily there- re arise, and as a matter of fact there are numerous ses in which the text has the one and the margin the her of these two words. Here, if we adhere to the xt, we read the negative, and then the force of the ause is to declare emphatically that the "days" were ritten in God's book, and in a real sense "fashioned," hen as yet they had not been recorded in earth's lendars. If, on the other hand, the marginal reading preferred, a striking meaning is obtained: "And for [*i.e.*, for the birth of the shapeless mass] there was ne among them [predestined in God's book]."

In vv. 17, 18, the poet gathers together and crowns ll his previous contemplations by the consideration hat this God, knowing him altogether, ever near him, nd Former of his being, has great "thoughts" or urposes affecting him individually. That assurance nakes omniscience and omnipresence joys, and not errors. The root meaning of the word rendered "precious" is *weighty*. The singer would weigh God's houghts towards him, and finds that they weigh down his scales. He would number them, and finds that they pass his enumeration. It is the same truth of the ranscendent greatness and graciousness of God's pur- poses as is conveyed in Isaiah's "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are . . . My thoughts than your thoughts." "I awake, and am still with Thee,"— this is an artless expression of the psalmist's blessed- ness in realising God's continual nearness. He awakes from sleep, and is conscious of glad wonder to find that, like a tender mother by her slumbering child, God has

been watching over him, and that all the blessed communion of past days abides as before.

The fiery hatred of evil and evil men which burns in the last strophe offends many and startles more. But while the vehement prayer that "Thou wouldest slay the wicked" is not in a Christian tone, the recoil from those who could raise themselves against such a God is the necessary result of the psalmist's delight in Him. Attraction and repulsion are equal and contrary. The measure of our cleaving to that which is good, and to Him who is good, settles the measure of our abhorrence of that which is evil. The abrupt passing from petition in ver. 19 *a* to command in *b* has been smoothed away by a slight alteration which reads, "And that men of blood would depart from me"; but the variation in tense is more forcible, and corresponds with the speaker's strong emotion. He cannot bear companionship with rebels against God. His indignation has no taint of personal feeling, but is pure zeal for God's honour.

Ver. 20 presents difficulties. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. (text) "speak against Thee" is peculiarly spelt if this is its meaning, and its construction is anomalous. Probably, therefore, the rendering should be as above. That meaning does not require a change of consonants, but only of vowel points. The difficulty of the last clause lies mainly in the word translated in the A.V. *adversaries* and in the R.V. "*enemies*." That meaning is questionable; and if the word is the nominative to the verb in the clause, the construction is awkward, since the preceding "who" would naturally extend its influence to this clause. Textual emendation has been resorted to; the simplest form of which is to read "against Thee" for "Thine adversaries," a

change of one letter. Another form of emendation, which is adopted by Cheyne and Graetz, substitutes "Thy name," and reads the whole, "And pronounce Thy name for falsehoods." Delitzsch adheres to the reading "adversaries," and by a harsh ellipsis makes the whole to run, "Who pronounce [Thy name] deceitfully—Thine adversaries."

The vindication of the psalmist's indignation lies in vv. 21, 22. That soul must glow with fervent love to God which feels wrong done to His majesty with as keen a pain as if it were itself struck. What God says to those who love Him, they in their degree say to God: "He that toucheth Thee toucheth the apple of mine eye." True, hate is not the Christian requital of hate, whether that is directed against God or God's servant. But recoil there must be, if there is any vigour of devotion; only, pity and love must mingle with it, and the evil of hatred be overcome by their good.

Very beautifully does the lowly prayer for searching and guidance follow the psalmist's burst of fire. It is easier to glow with indignation against evil-doers than to keep oneself from doing evil. Many secret sins may hide under a cloak of zeal for the Lord. So the psalmist prays that God would search him, not because he fancies that there is no lurking sin to be burned by the light of God's eye, like vermin that nestle and multiply under stones and shrivel when the sunbeams strike them, but because he dreads that there is, and would fain have it cast out. The psalm began with declaring that Jehovah had searched and known the singer, and it ends with asking for that searching knowledge.

It makes much difference, not indeed in the reality

or completeness of God's knowledge of us, but in the good we derive therefrom, whether we welcome and submit to it, or try to close our trembling hearts, that do not wish to be cleansed of their perilous stuff, from that loving and purging gaze. God will cleanse the evil which He sees, if we are willing that He should see it. Thoughts of the inner life and "ways" of the outer are equally to be submitted to Him. There are two "ways" in which men can walk. The one is a "way of grief or pain," because that is its terminus. All sin is a blunder. And the inclination to such ways is "in me," as every man who has dealt honestly with himself knows. The other is "a way everlasting," a way which leads to permanent good, which continues uninterrupted through the vicissitudes of life, and even (though that was not in the psalmist's mind) through the darkness of death, and with ever closer approximation to its goal in God, through the cycles of eternity. And that way is not "in me," but I must be led into and in it by the God who knows me altogether and is ever with me, to keep my feet in the way of life, if I will hold the guiding hand which He lays upon me.

PSALM CXL.

1 Deliver me, Jehovah, from the evil man,
From the man of violence guard me,
2 Who plot evils in heart,
Every day they stir up wars.
3 They have sharpened their tongue like a serpent,
Adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.

4 Keep me, Jehovah, from the hands of the wicked man,
From the man of violences guard me,
Who have plotted to overthrow my steps.
5 The proud have hidden a snare for me and cords,
They have spread a net hard by the path,
They have set gins for me. Selah.

6 I said to Jehovah, My God art Thou,
Give ear, Jehovah, to the voice of my supplications.
7 Jehovah, Lord, my stronghold of salvation!
Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle
8 Grant not, Jehovah, the desires of the wicked,
Further not his plan. Selah.

9 They who compass me about lift up the head—
The mischief of their own lips cover them!
10 [Jehovah] rain hot coals on them! (?)
Let Him cause them to fall into fire,
Into floods, that they rise no more!
11 The man with a [slanderous] tongue shall not continue on earth;
The man of violence—evil shall hunt him with blow upon blow.

12 I know that Jehovah will maintain the cause of the afflicted,
The right of the needy.
13 Surely the righteous shall thank Thy name,
The upright shall dwell with Thy face.

IN tone and contents this psalm has many parallels in the earlier books, especially among the psalms ascribed to David. Its originality lies principally in its use of peculiar words, and in the extreme obscurity of a part of it. The familiar situation of a man ringed about by slanderous enemies, the familiar metaphors of snares and traps, the familiar venture of faith flinging itself into God's arms for refuge, the familiar prayers for retribution, are all here. One cannot argue about impressions, but the present writer receives the impression strongly from the psalm that it is cast in the Davidic manner by a later singer, and is rather an echo than an original voice, while, no doubt, the feelings expressed, both of distress and of confidence, are none the less felt by the singer, though he falls back on familiar forms for their expression.

The arrangement is in four strophes of approximately equal length, the first and third of which consist of three verses of two clauses each, while the fourth is abnormally elongated by having three clauses in ver. 10, and the second (vv. 4, 5) has two verses of three clauses each. Selah again appears as dividing the strophes, but is omitted at the end of the fourth, to which a closing strophe of two verses is appended.

The first two strophes (vv. 1–3 and 4, 5) cover the same ground. Both set forth the psalmist's need, and plead for deliverance. The first verse of the second strophe (ver. 4) is almost identical with ver. 1. Both paint the psalmist's enemies as evil and violent, plotting against him privily. The only difference in the two strophes is in the metaphors describing the foes and their devices, and in the prominence given in the first to their slanderous and sharp tongues. The forms of their malice are like those in earlier psalms. A cha-

racteristic of the Psalter is the prominence given to hostility which has but bitter speech for its weapon (Psalm x. 7, lviii. 4). The slanderer's tongue is sharp like a serpent's, with which the popular opinion supposed that the venom was injected. The particular kind of serpent meant in ver. 3*a* is doubtful, as the word is only found here.

The figures for hostility in the second strophe are the other equally familiar ones of setting snares and traps. The contrivers are here called "proud," since their hostility to God's servant implies haughty antagonism to God. But they are not too proud to resort to tricks. Cunning and pride do not go well together, but they are united in these enemies, who spread a net "by the hand of the path."

In the third strophe, Faith rouses itself to lay hold on God. The psalmist turns from contemplating what his foes are doing, to realise what Jehovah is to him, and is wont to do for him. Since He is the singer's God and protects him in all conflict, he "finds it in his heart" to ask confidently that the plots of the foe may be wrecked. Consciousness of danger drove the poet in the former strophes to prayer; Jehovah's character and loving relations to him draw him, in this one.

"The day of battle" is literally "the day of armour" —when weapons clash and helmets are fitting wear. Then Jehovah will be as a head-piece to him, for He always gives the shape to His help which is required at the moment. The words in ver. 8 for "desires" and "plan" are found here only.

The text here is evidently in some disorder, and the word which is now awkwardly attached to the end of ver. 8 is by most commentators carried over to ver. 9. The change of position clears away difficulties in both

verses, but a considerable crop remains in this fourth strophe. The language becomes gnarled and obscure under the stress of the poet's emotion, as he prays for the destruction of his persecutors. If the transference of the word from ver. 8 to ver. 9 is accepted, that verse describes in vivid fashion what in prose would have been cast into the form of, "*When* my encompassers lift up the head [*i.e.*, in proud assault], *then*," etc. The psalmist omits the particles which would give a hypothetical form, and prefers to set the two things side by side, and leave sympathetic readers to feel their connection. Ver. 10 is very obscure. According to the Hebrew text, the first clause would have to be rendered, "Let coals be thrown on them"; but such a rendering is "contrary to the usage of the language." The Hebrew margin, therefore, corrects into, "Let them [*i.e.*, men indefinitely] cast down coals"; but this is harsh, and the office is strange as one attributed to men. The emendation which finds favour with most moderns substitutes for the inappropriate verb of the present text that which is used in precisely the same connection in Psalm xi. 6, and gives the reading, "Let Him [*i.e.*, Jehovah] rain coals on them." The following clause then swiftly adds another element of horror. Fire rains down from above; fire yawns below. They are beaten down by the burning storm, and they fall into a mass of flame. The noun in ver. 10*c* is found only here, and is by some rendered "pits," by others "floods," and by others is corrected into "nets." If "floods" is taken as the meaning, destruction by water is set by the side of that by fire, as if the antagonistic elements forgot their opposition and joined in strange amity to sweep the wicked from the earth. The terrible strophe ends with the assured declaration of the

Divinely appointed transiency of the evil-doers, especially of the slanderers against whom the psalmist took refuge in Jehovah. They shall be soon cut off, and the hunters (ver. 5) shall become the hunted. "Evil"—*i.e.*, the punishment of their evil deeds—shall dog their heels, and with stroke after stroke chase them as dogs would follow vermin.

In vv. 13, 14, the poet comes back to brighter thoughts, and his words become limpid again with his change of mood. He "knows," as the result of meditation and experience, that not only he, but all the afflicted and needy, who are righteous and upright, have God on their side. He will stand by their side in their hour of distress; He will admit them to dwell by His side, in deep, still communion, made more real and sweet by the harassments of earth, which drive them for shelter and peace to His breast. That confidence is a certitude for the psalmist. He announces it with an "I know," and seals it with a "surely." Such is the issue of trouble which was spread before Jehovah and vented itself in prayer.

PSALM CXLI.

1 Jehovah, I have called on Thee; haste to me,
Give ear to my voice when I call to Thee.
2 Let my prayer appear before Thee [as] incense,
The lifting up of my hands [as] an evening sacrifice.

3 Set a watch, Jehovah, before my mouth,
Keep guard over the door of my lips.
4 Incline not my heart to any evil thing,
To practise wicked practices with men that work iniquity,
And let me not eat of their dainties.

5 Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me,
[Such] oil for the head shall not my head refuse.
For so is it that my prayer shall continue in their wickednesses. (?)
6 Their judges are thrown down by the sides of the cliff, (?)
And they hear my sayings, that they are sweet. (?)
7 As a man ploughing and cleaving the earth,
Our bones are strewn at the mouth of Sheol.

8 For toward Thee, Jehovah, Lord, are mine eyes [turned];
In Thee do I take refuge—pour not out my soul.
9 Keep me from the hands of the snare which they have laid for me,
And from the gins of the doers of iniquity.
10 May the wicked fall into their own nets,
Whilst at the same time I pass by!

PART of this psalm is hopelessly obscure, and the connection is difficult throughout. It is a prayer of a harassed soul, tempted to slacken its hold on God, and therefore betaking itself to Him. Nothing more definite as to author or occasion can be said with certainty.

The allusions in vv. 6, 7, are dark to us, and the psalm must, in many parts, remain an enigma. Probably Baethgen and Cheyne are wise in giving up the attempt to extract any intelligible meaning from ver. 5 -

and ver. 6 as the words stand, and falling back on asterisks. Delitzsch regards the psalm as being composed as suitable to "a Davidic situation," either by David himself, or by some one who wished to give expression in strains like David's to David's probable mood. It would thus be a "Dramatic Idyll," referring, according to Delitzsch, to Absalom's revolt. Ver. 2 is taken by him to allude to the king's absence from the sanctuary, and the obscure ver. 6, to the fate of the leaders of the revolt and the return of the mass of the people to loyal submission. But this is a very precarious reference.

The psalm begins with the cry to God to hear, which so often forms the introduction to psalms of complaint and supplications for deliverance. But here a special colouring is given by the petition that the psalmist's prayers may be equivalent to incense and sacrifice. It does not follow that he was shut out from outward participation in worship, but only that he had learned what that worship meant. "Appear" might be rendered "established." The word means to be set firm, or, reflexively, to station oneself, and hence is taken by some as equivalent to "appear" or "come" before Thee; while others give prominence rather to the notion of stability in the word, and take it to mean *continue—i.e.*, be accepted. There may be a reference to the morning sacrifice in the "incense," so that both morning and evening ritual would be included; but it is more natural to think of the evening incense, accompanying the evening "meal offering," and to suppose that the psalm is an evening prayer. The penetrating insight into the realities of spiritual worship which the singer has gained is more important to note than such questions about the scope of his figures.

The prayer in vv. 3, 4, is for deliverance not from dangers, but from temptation to sin in word or deed. The psalmist is not suffering from the hostility of the workers of iniquity, but dreads becoming infected with their sin. This phase of trial was not David's in Absalom's revolt, and the prominence given to it here makes Delitzsch's view of the psalm very doubtful. An earlier psalmist had vowed to "put a muzzle on his mouth," but a man's own guard over his words will fail, unless God keeps the keeper, and, as it were, sets a sentry to watch the lips. The prayer for strength to resist temptation to wrong acts, which follows that against wrong speech, is curiously loaded with synonymous terms. The psalmist asks that his heart, which is but too apt to feel the risings of inclination to fall in with the manners around him, may be stiffened into wholesome loathing of every evil—"To practise practices in wickedness with men [perhaps, *great men*] who work iniquity." The clause rather drags, and the proposed insertion of "Let me not sit" before "with men that work iniquity" lightens the weight, and supplies a good parallel with "Let me not eat of their dainties." It is, however, purely conjectural, and the existing reading is intelligible, though heavy. The psalmist wishes to keep clear of association with the corrupt society around him, and desires to be preserved from temptations to fall in with its luxurious sensuality, lest thereby he should slide into imitation of its sins. He chose plain living, because he longed for high thinking, and noble doing, and grave, reverend speech. All this points to a period when the world fought against goodness by proffering vulgar delights, rather than by persecution. Martyrs have little need to pray that they may not be tempted by persecutors' feasts.

This man "scorned delights" and chose to dwell with good men.

The connection of ver. 5 with the preceding seems to be that in it the psalmist professes his preference for the companionship of the righteous, even if they reprove him. It is better, in his judgment, to have the wholesome correction of the righteous than to feast with the wicked. But while this is the bearing of the first part of the verse, the last clause is obscure, almost to unintelligibility, and even the earlier ones are doubtful. If the Hebrew accents are adhered to, the rendering above must be adopted. The division of clauses and rendering adopted by Hupfeld and many others, and in the A.V. and R.V., gives vividness, but requires "it shall be" to be twice supplied. The whole sentence seems to run more smoothly, if the above translation is accepted. "Oil for the head" is that with which the head is anointed as for a feast; and there is probably a tacit suggestion of a better festival, spread in the austere abodes of the righteous poor, than on the tables loaded with the dainties of the wicked rich.

But what is the meaning and bearing of the last clause of ver. 5? No wholly satisfactory answer has been given. It is needless here to travel through the various more or less violent and unsuccessful attempts to unravel the obscurities of this clause and of the next verse. One sympathises with Hupfeld's confession that it is an unwelcome (*sauer*) task to him to quote the whirl of varying conjectures. The rendering adopted above, as, on the whole, the least unlikely, is substantially Delitzsch's. It means that the psalmist "will oppose no weapon but prayer to his enemies' wickedness, and is therefore in the spiritual mood susceptible to well-meaning reproof." The logic of

the clause is not very clear, even with this explanation. The psalmist's continuance in prayer against the wicked is not very obviously a reason for his accepting kindly rebuke. But no better explanation is proposed.

The darkness thickens in ver. 6. The words indeed are all easily translatable; but what the whole sentence means, or what an allusion to the destruction of some unnamed people's rulers has to do here, or who they are who hear the psalmist's words, are questions as yet unanswered. To cast men down "by the sides [lit., *hands*] of a rock" is apparently an expression for the cruel punishment mentioned as actually inflicted on ten thousand of the "children of Seir" (2 Chron. xxv. 12). Those who, with Delitzsch, take the revolt under Absalom to be the occasion of the psalm, find in the casting down of these judges an imaginative description of the destruction of the leaders of the revolt, who are supposed to be hurled down the rocks by the people whom they had misled; while the latter, having again come to their right mind, attend to David's word, and find it pleasant and beneficent. But this explanation requires much supplementing of the language, and does not touch the difficulty of bringing the verse into connection with the preceding.

Nor is the connection with what follows more clear. A various reading substitutes "Their" for "Our" in ver. 7, and so makes the whole verse a description of the bones of the ill-fated "judges" lying in a litter at the base of the precipice. But apparently the reading is merely an attempt to explain the difficulty. Clearly enough the verse gives an extraordinarily energetic and graphic picture of a widespread slaughter. But who are the slain, and what event or events in the history of Israel are here imaginatively reproduced, is quite

unknown. All that is certain is the tremendous force of the representation, the Æschylean ruggedness of the metaphor, and the desperate condition to which it witnesses. The point of the figure lies in the resemblance of the bones strewn at the mouth of Sheol to broken clods turned up by a plough. *Sheol* seems here to waver between the meanings of the unseen world of souls and the grave. The unburied bones of slaughtered saints "lie scattered," as unregarded as the lumps of soil behind the ploughman.

In vv. 8–10 the familiar psalm-tone recurs, and the language clears itself. The stream has been foaming among rocks in a gorge, but it has emerged into sunlight, and flows smoothly. Only the "For" at the beginning of ver. 8 is difficult, if taken to refer to the immediately preceding verses. Rather, it overleaps the obscure middle part of the psalm, and links on to the petitions of vv. 1–4. Patient, trustful expectance is the psalmist's temper, which gazes not interrogatively, but with longing which is sure of satisfaction, towards God, from amidst the temptations or sorrows of earth. The reason for that fixed look of faith lies in the Divine names, so rich in promise, which are here blended in an unusual combination. The devout heart pleads its own act of faith in conjunction with God's names, and is sure that, since He is Jehovah, Lord, it cannot be vain to hide oneself in Him. Therefore, the singer prays for preservation from destruction. "Pour not out my soul" recalls Isa. liii. 12, where the same vivid metaphor is used. The prayer of the earlier verses was for protection from temptation; here, circumstances have darkened, and the psalmist's life is in danger. Possibly the "snares" and "gins" of ver. 9 mean both temptations and perils.

The final petition in ver. 10 is like many in earlier psalms. It was a fundamental article of faith for all the psalmists that a great *Lex Talionis* was at work, by which every sin was avenged in kind; and if one looks deeper than the outside of life, the faith is eternally warranted. For nothing is more certain than that, whomsoever else a man may harm by his sin, he harms himself most. Nets woven and spread for others may or may not ensnare them, but their meshes cling inextricably round the feet of their author, and their tightening folds will wrap him helpless, like a fly in a spider's web. The last clause presents some difficulties. The word rendered above "at the same time" is literally "together," but seems to be used here, as in Psalm iv. 8 (*at once*), with the meaning of *simultaneously*. The two things are co-temporaneous—the enemies' ensnaring and the psalmist's escape. The clause is abnormal in its order of words. It stands thus: "At the same time I, while [until] I pass by." Probably the irregularity arose from a desire to put the emphatic word "at the same time" in the prominent place. It is doubtful whether we should translate "while" or "until." Authorities are divided, and either meaning is allowable. But though the rendering *until* gives picturesqueness to the representation of the snared foe restrained and powerless, until his hoped-for prey walks calmly through the toils, the same idea is conveyed by "while," and that rendering avoids the implication that the snaring lasted only as long as the time taken for the psalmist's escape. What is uppermost in the psalmist's mind is, in any case, not the destruction of his enemies, but their being made powerless to prevent his "passing by" their snares uncaptured.

PSALM CXLII.

1 With my voice to Jehovah will I cry,
With my voice to Jehovah will I make supplication.
2 I will pour out before Him my complaint,
My straits before Him will I declare.
3 When my spirit wraps itself in gloom upon me,
Then Thou—Thou knowest my path;
In the way wherein I have to go
They have hidden a snare for me.
4 Look on the right hand and see,
There is none that knows me,
Shelter is perished from me,
There is no one that makes inquiry after my soul.

5 I have cried unto Thee, Jehovah,
I have said, Thou art my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.
6 Attend to my shrill cry,
For I am become very weak;
Deliver me from my pursuers,
For they are too strong for me.
7 Bring out from prison my soul,
That I may thank Thy name;
In me shall the righteous glory,
For Thou dealest bountifully with me.

THE superscription not only calls this a psalm of David's, but specifies the circumstances of its composition. It breathes the same spirit of mingled fear and faith which characterises many earlier psalms; but one fails to catch the unmistakable note of freshness, and there are numerous echoes of preceding singers. This psalmist has as deep sorrows as his predecessors, and as firm a grasp of Jehovah, his helper. His song

runs naturally in well-worn channels, and is none the less genuine and acceptable to God because it does. Trouble and lack of human sympathy or help have done their best work on him, since they have driven him to God's breast. He has cried in vain to man; and now he has gathered himself up in a firm resolve to cast himself upon God. Men may take offence that they are only appealed to as a last resort, but God does not. The psalmist is too much in earnest to be content with unspoken prayers. His voice must help his thoughts. Wonderful is the power of articulate utterance in defining, and often in diminishing, sorrows. Put into words, many a burden shrinks. Speaking his grief, many a man is calmed and braced to endure. The complaint poured out before God ceases to flood the spirit; the straits told to Him begin to grip less tightly.

Ver. 1 resembles Psalm lxxvii. 1, and ver. 3 has the same vivid expression for a spirit swathed in melancholy as Psalm lxxvii. 3. Hupfeld would transfer ver. 3 *a* to ver. 2, as being superfluous in ver. 3, and, in connection with the preceding, stating the situation or disposition from which the psalmist's prayer flows. If so taken, the copula (And) introducing *b* will be equivalent to "But," and contrasts the omniscience of God with the psalmist's faintheartedness. If the usual division of verses is retained, the same contrast is presented still more forcibly, and the copula may be rendered "Then." The outpouring of complaint is not meant to tell Jehovah what He does not know. It is for the complainer's relief, not for God's information. However a soul is wrapped in gloom, the thought that God knows the road which is so dark brings a little creeping beam into the blackness. In the strength of

that conviction the psalmist beseeches Jehovah to behold what He does behold. That is the paradox of faithful prayer, which asks for what it knows that it possesses, and dared not ask for unless it knew. The form of the word rendered above "Look" is irregular, a "hybrid" (Delitzsch); but when standing beside the following "see," it is best taken as an imperative of petition to Jehovah. The old versions render both words as first person singular, in which they are followed by Baethgen, Graetz, and Cheyne. It is perhaps more natural that the psalmist should represent himself as looking round in vain for help, than that he should ask God to look; and, as Baethgen remarks, the copula before "There is none" in ver. 4 *b* favours this reading, as it is superfluous with an imperative. In either case the drift of ver. 4 is to set forth the suppliant's forlorn condition. The "right hand" is the place for a champion or helper, but this lonely sufferer's is unguarded, and there is none who knows him, in the sense of recognising him as one to be helped (Ruth ii. 10, 19). Thus abandoned, friendless, and solitary, confronted by foes, he looks about for some place to hide in; but that too has failed him (Job xi. 20; Jer. xxv. 35; Amos ii. 14). There is no man interested enough in him to make inquiry after his life. Whether he is alive or dead matters not a straw to any..

Thus utterly naked of help, allies, and earthly hiding-place, what can a man do but fling himself into the arms of God? This one does so, as the rest of the psalm tells. He had looked all round the horizon in vain for a safe cranny to creep into and escape. He was out in the open, without a bush or rock to hide behind, on all the dreary level. So he looks up, and suddenly there rises by his side an inexpugnable

fortress, as if a mountain sprang at once from the flat earth. "I have said, Thou art my refuge!" Whoso says thus has a shelter, Some One to care for him, and the gloom begins to thin off from his soul. The psalmist is not only safe in consequence of his prayer, but rich; for the soul which, by strong resolve, even in the midst of straits, claims God as its portion will at once realise its portion in God.

The prayer for complete deliverance in vv. 6, 7, passes into calmness, even while it continues fully conscious of peril and of the power of the pursuers. Such is the reward of invoking Jehovah's help. Agitation is soothed, and, even before any outward effect has been manifest, the peace of God begins to shed itself over heart and mind. The suppliant still spreads his needs before God, is still conscious of much weakness, of strong persecutors, and feels that he is, as it were, in prison (an evident metaphor, though Graetz, with singular prosaicness, will have it to be literal); but he has hold of God now, and so is sure of deliverance, and already begins to shape his lips for songs of praise, and to anticipate the triumph which his experience will afford to those who are righteous, and so are his fellows. He was not, then, so utterly solitary as he had wailed that he was. There were some who would joy in his joy, even if they could not help his misery. But the soul that has to wade through deep waters has always to do it alone; for no human sympathy reaches to full knowledge of, or share in, even the best loved one's grief. We have companions in joy; sorrow we have to face by ourselves. Unless we have Jesus with us in the darkness, we have no one.

The word rendered above "shall glory" is taken in different meanings. According to some, it is to be

rendered here "surround"—*i.e.*, with congratulations; others would take the meaning to be "shall crown themselves"—*i.e.*, "triumph on my account" (Delitzsch, etc.). Graetz suggests a plausible emendation, which Cheyne adopts, reading "glory in," the resulting meaning being the same as that of Delitzsch. The notion of participation in the psalmist's triumph is evidently intended to be conveyed; and any of these renderings preserves that. Possibly *surround* is most in accordance with the usage of the word. Thus the psalmist's plaints end, as plaints which are prayers ever do, in triumph anticipated by faith, and one day to be realised in experience.

PSALM CXLIII.

1 Jehovah, hear my prayer, give ear to my supplications,
In Thy faithfulness answer me, in Thy righteousness;
2 And enter not into judgment with Thy servant,
For before Thee shall no man living be righteous.
3 For the enemy has pursued my soul,
Crushed my life to the ground,
Made me to dwell in dark places, like the dead of
long ago.

4 Therefore my spirit wraps itself in gloom in me,
Within me is my heart benumbed.
5 I remember the days of old,
I muse on all Thy doings,
On the work of Thy hands I brood.
6 I spread my hands to Thee,
My soul is towards Thee like a thirsty land. Selah.

7 Make haste, answer me, Jehovah; my spirit faints;
Hide not Thy face from me,
Lest I become like those that descend into the pit.
8 Make me hear Thy loving-kindness in the morning,
For in Thee do I trust;
Make me know the way in which I should go,
For to Thee do I lift my soul.
9 Deliver me from mine enemies, Jehovah,
For to Thee do I flee for refuge. (?)

10 Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God;
Let Thy good spirit lead me in a level land.
11 For Thy name's sake, Jehovah, quicken me;
In Thy righteousness bring my soul out of all straits;
12 And in Thy loving-kindness cut off my foes,
And destroy all who oppress my soul,
For I am Thy servant.

THIS psalm's depth of sadness and contrition, blended with yearning trust, recalls the earlier psalms attributed to David. Probably this general

resemblance in inwardness and mood is all that is meant by the superscription in calling it "a psalm of David." Its copious use of quotations and allusions indicate a late date. But there is no warrant for taking the speaker to be the personified Israel. It is clearly divided into two equal halves, as indicated by the Selah, which is not found in Books IV. and V., except here, and in Psalm cxl. The former half (vv. 1–6) is complaint; the latter (vv. 7–12), petition. Each part may again may be regarded as falling into two equal portions, so that the complaint branches out into a plaintive description of the psalmist's peril (vv. 1–3), and a melancholy disclosure of his feelings (vv. 4–6); while the prayer is similarly parted into cries for deliverance (vv. 7–9), and for inward enlightenment and help (vv. 10–12). But we are not reading a logical treatise, but listening to the cry of a tried spirit, and so need not wonder if the discernible sequence of thought is here and there broken.

The psalmist knows that his affliction is deserved. His enemy could not have hunted and crushed him (ver. 3) unless God had been thereby punishing him. His peril has forced home the penitent conviction of his sin, and therefore he must first have matters set right between him and God by Divine forgiveness. His cry for help is not based upon any claims of his own, nor even on his extremity of need, but solely on God's character, and especially on the twin attributes of Faithfulness and Righteousness. By the latter is not meant the retributive righteousness which gives according to desert, but that by which He maintains the order of salvation established by His holy love. The prayer anticipates St. John's declaration that God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins." That

answer in righteousness is as eagerly desired as God's dealing on the footing of retributive justice is shrunk from. "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant" is not a prayer referring to a future appearance before the Judge of all, but the judgment deprecated is plainly the enmity of men, which, as the next verse complains, is crushing the psalmist's life out of him. His cry is for deliverance from it, but he feels that a more precious gift must precede outward deliverance, and God's forgiveness must first be sealed on his soul. The conviction that, when the light of God's face is turned on the purest life, it reveals dark stains which retributive justice cannot but condemn, is not, in the psalmist's mouth, a palliation of his guilt. Rather, it drives him to take his place among the multitude of offenders, and from that lowly position to cry for pardon to the very Judge whose judgment he cannot meet. The blessedness of contrite trust is that it nestles the closer to God, the more it feels its unworthiness. The child hides its face on the mother's bosom when it has done wrong. God is our refuge from God. A little beam of light steals into the penitent's darkness, while he calls himself God's servant, and ventures to plead that relation, though he has done what was unworthy of it, as a reason for pardon. The significant "For" beginning ver. 3 shows that the enemy's acts were, to the contrite psalmist, those of God's stern justice. Vv. 3 *a*, *b*, are moulded on Psalm vii. 5, and *c* is verbally identical with Lam. iii. 6. "The dead of long ago" is by some rendered *dead for ever*; but the translation adopted above adds force to the psalmist's sad description of himself, by likening him to those forgotten ones away back in the mists of bygone ages.

In vv. 4–6 the record of the emotions caused by his

peril follows. They begin with the natural gloom. As in Psalm cxlii. 3 (with which this has many points of resemblance, possibly indicating identity of author), he describes his "spirit" as swathed in dark robes of melancholy. His heart, too, the centre of personality, was *stunned* or *benumbed*, so that it almost ceased to beat. What should a "servant" of Jehovah's, brought to such a pass, do? If he is truly God's, he will do precisely what this man did. He will compel his thoughts to take another direction, and call Memory in to fight Despair and feed Hope. His own past and God's past are arguments enough to cheer the most gloom-wrapped sufferer. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow" may be "remembering happier things," but the remembrance will be better used to discrown a sorrow which threatens to lord it over a life. Psalm lxxvii. 5, 6, 11, 12, has shaped the expressions here. Both the contrast of present misery with past mercy, and the assurances of present help given by that past mercy, move the psalmist to appeal to God, stretching out his hands in entreaty. Psalm lxiii. 1 echoes in ver. 6 *b*, the pathos and beauty of which need no elucidation. The very cracks in parched ground are like mouths opened for the delaying rains; so the singer's soul was gaping wide in trouble for God's coming, which would refresh and fertilise. Blessed is that weariness which is directed to Him; it ever brings the showers of grace for which it longs. The construction of ver. 6 *b* is doubtful, and the supplement "thirsteth" (A.V. and R.V.) is possibly better than the "is" given above.

The second half of the psalm is purely petition. Vv. 7–9 ask especially for outward deliverance. They abound with reminiscences of earlier psalms. "Make haste, answer me" recalls Psalm lxix. 17; "my spirit

faints" is like Psalm lxxxiv. 2; "Hide not Thy face from me" is a standing petition, as in Psalms xxvii. 9, cii. 2, etc.; "Lest I become like those who descend into the pit" is exactly reproduced from Psalm xxviii. 1. The prayer for the manifestation of God's loving-kindness in the morning is paralleled in Psalm xc. 14, and that for illumination as to the way to walk in is like Exod. xxxiii. 13; Psalm xxv. 4. The plea "To Thee do I lift my soul" is found in Psalms xxv. 1, lxxxvi. 4.

The plea appended to the petition in ver. 9*b* is difficult. Literally, the words run, "To Thee have I covered [myself]," which can best be explained as a pregnant construction, equivalent to "I have fled to Thee and hid myself in Thee." Much divergence exists in the renderings of the clause. But a slight emendation, adopted by Hupfeld and Cheyne from an ancient Jewish commentator, reads the familiar expression, "I have fled for refuge." Baethgen prefers to read "have waited," which also requires but a trivial alteration; while Graetz reaches substantially the same result by another way, and would render "I have hope."

A glance at these three verses of petition as a whole brings out the sequence of the prayers and of their pleas. The deepest longing of the devout soul is for the shining of God's face, the consciousness of His loving regard, and that not only because it scatters fears and foes, but because it is good to bathe in that sunshine. The next longing is for the dawning of a glad morning, which will bring to a waiting heart sweet whispers of God's loving-kindness, as shown by outward deliverances. The night of fear has been dark and tearful, but joy comes with the morning. The next need is for guidance in the way in which a man

should go, which here must be taken in the lower sense of practical direction, rather than in any higher meaning. That higher meaning follows in vv. 10–12; but in ver. 8 the suppliant asks to be shown the path by which he can secure deliverance from his foes. That deliverance is the last of his petitions. His pleas are beautiful as examples of the logic of supplication. He begins with his great need. His spirit faints, and he is on the edge of the black pit into which so much brightness and strength have gone down. The margin is slippery and crumbling; his feet are feeble. One Helper alone can hold him up. But his own exceeding need is not all that he pleads. He urges his trust, his fixing of his desires, hopes, and whole self, by a dead lift of faith, on God. That is a reason for Divine help. Anything is possible rather than that such hope should be disappointed. It cannot be that any man, who has fled for sanctuary to the asylum of God's heart, should be dragged thence and slain before the God whose altar he has vainly clasped.

The last part (vv. 10–12) puts foremost the prayer for conformity of will with God's, and, though it closes with recurring prayer for outward deliverance, yet breathes desires for more inward blessings. As in the preceding verses, there are, in these closing ones, many echoes of other psalms. The sequence of petitions and pleas is instructive. To do, not merely to know, God's will is the condition of all blessedness, and will be the deepest desire of every man who is truly God's servant. But that obedience of heart and hand must be taught by God, and He regards our taking Him for our God as establishing a claim on Him to give all illumination of heart and all bending of will and all skill of hand which are necessary to make

us doers of His will. His teaching is no mere outward communication of knowledge, but an inbreathing of power to discern, and of disposition and ability to perform, what is His will. Ver. 10*b* is best taken as a continuous sentence, embodying a prayer for guidance. The plea on which it rests remains the same, though the statement of it as a separate clause is not adopted in our translation. For the fact that God's spirit is "good"—*i.e.*, beneficently self-communicative—heartens us to ask, and binds Him to give, all such direction as is needed. This is not a mere repetition of the prayer in ver. 8, but transcends it. "A level land" (or, according to a possible suggested emendation, *path*) is one in which the psalmist can freely walk, unhindered in doing God's will. His next petition goes deepest of the three, inasmuch as it asks for that new Divine life to be imparted, without which no teaching to do God's will can be assimilated, and no circumstances, however favourable, will conduce to doing it. He may not have known all the depth which his prayer sounded; but no man who has real desires to conform heart and life to the supreme will of God but must have felt his need of a purer life to be poured into his spirit. As this prayer is deep, so its plea is high. "For Thy name's sake"—nothing can be pleaded of such force as that. God supremely desires the glory of His name; and, for the sake of men whose blessedness depends on their knowing and loving it, will do nothing that can dim its lustre. His name is the record of His past acts, the disclosure of that in Him which is knowable. That name contains the principles of all His future acts. He will be what He has been. He will magnify His name; and the humblest, most tormented soul that can say, "Thou art my God," may be sure that Divinely

given life will throb in it, and that even its lowliness may contribute to the honour of the name.

The hunted psalmist cannot but come back, in the close of his psalm, to his actual circumstances, for earthly needs do clog the soul's wings. He unites righteousness and loving-kindness as co-operating powers, as in ver. 1 he had united faithfulness and righteousness. And as in the first verses he had blended pleas drawn from God's character with those drawn from his relation to God, so he ends his petitions with pleading that he is God's servant, and, as such, a fit object of God's protection

PSALM CXLIV.

1 Blessed be Jehovah my rock, who trains my hands for battle,
My fingers for war;
2 My loving-kindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer,
My shield and He in whom I take refuge,
Who subdues my people under me.

3 Jehovah, what is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him?
The son of frail man, that Thou takest account of him?
4 Man—he is like to a breath,
His days are like a shadow passing away.

5 Jehovah, bow Thy heavens and come down,
Touch the mountains that they smoke.
6 Lighten lightning and scatter them,
Shoot Thy arrows and confound them.
7 Stretch Thy hands from on high,
Pluck me [out] and deliver me from many waters,
From the hands of the sons of the alien,
8 Whose mouth speaks falsehood,
And whose right hand is a right hand of lies.

9 O God, a new song will I sing to Thee,
On a ten-stringed harp will I harp to Thee,
10 Who giveth salvation to kings,
Who snatches David His servant from the evil sword.
11 Pluck me [out] and deliver me from the hand of the sons of the alien,
Whose mouth speaks falsehood,
And whose right hand is a right hand of lies.

12 So that (? or Because) our sons [may be] as plants,
Grown tall in their youth;
Our daughters like corner-pillars,
Carved after the fashion of a palace;
13 Our granaries full, giving forth kind after kind [of supply];

Our flocks producing thousands,
Producing tens of thousands in our fields;
14 Our kine heavy with young;
No breach and no sally,
And no [battle-] cry in our open spaces.
15 Happy the people that is in such a case!
Happy the people whose God is Jehovah!

THE force of compilation could no further go than in this psalm, which is, in the first eleven verses, simply a *réchauffé* of known psalms, and in vv. 12–15 is most probably an extract from an unknown one of later date. The junctions are not effected with much skill, and the last is tacked on very awkwardly (ver. 12). It is completely unlike the former part, inasmuch as there the speaker is a warlike king praying for victory, while in the latter the nation sings of the tranquil blessings of peaceful expansion. The language of the later portion is full of late forms and obscurities. But the compiler's course of thought is traceable. He begins by praising Jehovah, who has taught him warlike skill; then adoringly thinks of his own weakness, made strong by God's condescending regard; next prays for complete victory, and vows fresh praises for new mercies; and closes with a picture of the prosperity which follows conquest, and is secured to Israel because Jehovah is its God.

Vv. 1, 2, are echoes of Psalm xviii. 2, 34, 46, with slight variations. The remarkable epithet "My loving-kindness" offends some critics, who emend so as to read "My stronghold"; but it has a parallel in Jonah ii. 9, and is forcible as an emotional abbreviation of the fuller "God of my loving-kindness" (Psalm lix. 10). The original passage reads "people," which is the only appropriate word in this connection, and should probably be read in ver. 2*c*.

Psalm viii. supplies the original of vv. 3, 4, with a reminiscence of Psalm xxxix. 5, and of Psalm cii. 11, from which comes the pathetic image of the fleeting shadow. The link between this and the former extract seems to be the recognition of God's condescension in strengthening so weak and transient a creature for conflict and conquest.

The following prayer for further Divine help in further struggles is largely borrowed from the magnificent picture of a theophany in Psalm xviii. 9, 14–16. The energetic "Lighten lightning" is peculiar to this psalm, as is the use of the word for "Pluck out." The description of the enemies as "sons of the alien" is like Psalm xviii. 44, 45. As in many other psalms, the treachery of the foe is signalised. They break their oaths. The right hand which they had lifted in swearing is a lying hand. The vow of new praise recalls Psalms xxxiii. 2, 3, and xcvi. 1, xcviii. 1. Ver. 10 is a reproduction of Psalm xviii. 50. The mention of David's deliverance from the "evil sword" has apparently been the reason for the LXX. referring the psalm to the victory over Goliath—an impossible view. The new song is not here sung; but the psalm drops from the level of praise to renew the petition for deliverance, in the manner of a refrain caught up in ver. 11 from ver. 7. This might make a well-rounded close, and may have originally been the end of the psalm.

The appended fragment (vv. 12–15) is attached to the preceding in a most embarrassing fashion. The first word of ver. 12 is the sign of the relative. The LXX. accordingly translates "Whose sons are," etc., and understands the whole as a description of the prosperity of the enemies, which view necessarily involves the alteration of "our" into "their" in the following

clauses. Others supply an antecedent to the relative by inserting *save us* or the like expression at the beginning of the verse. Others, again—*e.g.*, Ewald, followed by Perowne—connect the relative with ver. 15: "We whose sons are," etc. . . . "Happy is the people," etc. Delitzsch takes the relative to signify here "because," and compares Judg. ix. 17; Jer. xvi. 13. The prosperity subsequently described would then be alleged as the occasion of the enemies' envy. Others would slightly emend the text so as to read, "I pronounce happy," or "Happy are we." The latter, which makes all smooth, and corresponds with ver. 15, is Graetz's proposal. The rendering of the A.V., "that" or "in order that," has much in its favour. The word which is the sign of the relative is a component of the full expression usually so rendered, and stands alone as equivalent to it in Deut. iv. 40, Gen. xi. 7. It is true, as Delitzsch objects to this rendering, that the following verbs are usually finite, while here they are participles; but that is not a fatal objection. The whole that follows would then be dependent on the petition of ver. 11, and would describe the purpose of the desired deliverance. "This is, in fact, the poet's meaning. He prays for deliverance from enemies, in order that the happy condition pictured in ver. 12 *sqq.* may come to pass" (Baethgen). On the whole, that rendering presents least difficulty, but in any case the seam is clumsy.

The substance of the description includes three things—a vigorous, growing population, agricultural prosperity, and freedom from invasion. The language is obscure, especially in ver. 14, but the general drift is plain. The characteristic Jewish blessing of numerous offspring is first touched on in two figures, of which the

former is forcible and obvious, and the latter obscure. The comparison of the virgin daughters of Israel to "corners" is best understood by taking the word to mean "corner-pillars," not necessarily caryatides, as is usually supposed—an architectural decoration unknown in the East. The points of comparison would then be slender uprightness and firm grace. Delitzsch prefers to take the word as meaning *cornices*, such as, to the present day, are found in the angles of Eastern rooms, and are elaborately carved in mazy patterns and brightly coloured. He would also render "variegated" instead of "carved." But such a comparison puts too much stress on gay dresses, and too little on qualities corresponding to those of the "well-grown" youths in the former clause.

The description of a flourishing rural community is full of difficult words. "Granaries" is found only here, and "kind" is a late word. "Fields" is the same word as is usually rendered "streets"; it literally means "places outside," and here obviously must refer to the open pastures without the city, in contrast to the "open spaces" within it, mentioned in the next verse. In that verse almost every word is doubtful. That rendered "kine" is masculine in form, but is generally taken as being applicable to both sexes, and here used for the milky mothers of the herd. The word translated above "heavy with young" means *laden*, and if the accompanying noun is masculine, must mean laden with the harvest sheaves; but the parallel of the increasing flocks suggests the other rendering. The remainder of ver. 14 would in form make a complete verse, and it is possible that something has fallen out between the first clause and the two latter. These paint tranquil city life when enemies are far away.

"No breach"—*i.e.*, in the defences, by which besiegers could enter; "No going forth"—*i.e.*, sally of the besieged, as seems most probable, though *going forth as captured* or *surrendering* has been suggested; "No cry"—*i.e.*, of assailants who have forced an entrance, and of defenders who make their last stand in the open places of the city.

The last verse sums up all the preceding picture of growth, prosperity, and tranquillity, and traces it to the guardian care and blessing of Jehovah. The psalmist may seem to have been setting too much store by outward prosperity. His last word not only points to the one Source of it, but sets high above the material consequences of God's favour, joyous as these are, that favour itself, as the climax of human blessedness.

PSALM CXLV.

1 א I will exalt Thee, my God, O King,
And I will bless Thy name for ever and aye.
2 ב Every day will I bless Thee,
And I will praise Thy name for ever and aye.
3 ג Great is Jehovah and much to be praised,
And of His greatness there is no searching.
4 ד Generation to generation shall loudly praise Thy works
And Thy mighty acts shall they declare.
5 ה The splendour of the glory of Thy majesty,
And the records of Thy wonders will I meditate.
6 ו And the might of Thy dread acts shall they speak,
And Thy greatness will I tell over.

7 ז The memory of Thy abundant goodness shall they well forth,
And Thy righteousness shall they shout aloud.
8 ח Gracious and full of compassion is Jehovah,
Slow to anger and great in loving-kindness.
9 ט Good is Jehovah to all,
And His compassions are upon all His works.
10 י All Thy works thank Thee, Jehovah,
And Thy favoured ones shall bless Thee.

11 כ The glory of Thy kingdom shall they speak,
And talk of Thy might;
12 ל To make known to the sons of men His mighty deeds
And the glory of the splendour of His kingdom.
13 מ Thy kingdom is a kingdom for all ages,
And Thy dominion [endures] through every generation after generation.

14 ס Jehovah upholds all the falling,
And raises all the bowed down.
15 ע The eyes of all look expectantly to Thee,
And Thou givest them their food in its season

16 ס Thou openest Thy hand,
And satisfiest every living thing [with] its desire.
17 צ Jehovah is righteous in all His ways,
And loving in all His works.
18 ק Jehovah is near to all who call on Him,
To all who call on Him in truth.
19 ר The desire of them that fear Him He will fulfil,
And their cry He will hear and will save them.
20 ש Jehovah keeps all who love Him,
And all the wicked will He destroy.

21 ת The praise of Jehovah my mouth shall speak,
And let all flesh bless His holy name for ever and aye.

THIS is an acrostic psalm. Like several others of that kind, it is slightly irregular, one letter (Nun) being omitted. The omission is supplied in the LXX. by an obviously spurious verse inserted in the right place between vv. 13 and 14. Though the psalm has no strophical divisions, it has distinct sequence of thought, and celebrates the glories of Jehovah's character and deeds from a fourfold point of view. It sings of His greatness (vv. 1–6), goodness (vv. 7–10), His kingdom (vv. 11–13), and the universality of His beneficence (vv. 14–21). It is largely coloured by other psalms, and is unmistakably of late origin.

The first group of verses has two salient characteristics—the accumulation of epithets expressive of the more majestic aspects of Jehovah's self-revelation, and the remarkable alternation of the psalmist's solo of song and the mighty chorus, which takes up the theme and sends a shout of praise echoing down the generations.

The psalmist begins with his own tribute of praise, which he vows shall be perpetual. Ver. 1 recalls Psalms xxx. 1 and xxxiv. 1. We "exalt" God, when we recognise that He is King, and worthily adore Him as such. A heart suffused with joy in the thought of

God would fain have no other occupation than the loved one of ringing out His name. The singer sets "for ever and aye" at the end of both ver. 1 and ver. 2, and while it is possible to give the expression a worthy meaning as simply equivalent to *continually*, it is more in harmony with the exalted strain of the psalm and the emphatic position of the words to hear in them an expression of the assurance which such delight in God and in the contemplation of Him naturally brings with it, that over communion so deep and blessed, Death has no power. "Every day will I bless Thee"—that is the happy vow of the devout heart. "And I will praise Thy name for ever and ever"—that is the triumphant confidence that springs from the vow. The experiences of fellowship with God are prophets of their own immortality.

Ver. 3 *a* is from Psalm xlviii. 1, and *b* is tinged by Isaiah xl., but substitutes "greatness," the key-note of the first part of this psalm, for "understanding." That note having been thus struck, is taken up in vv. 4–6, which set forth various aspects of that greatness, as manifested in works which are successively described as "mighty"—*i.e.*, instinct with conquering power such as a valiant hero wields; as, taken together, constituting the "splendour of the glory of Thy majesty," the flashing brightness with which, when gathered, as it were, in a radiant mass, they shine out, like a great globe of fire; as "wonders," not merely in the narrower sense of miracles, but as being productive of lowly astonishment in the thoughtful spectator; and as being "dread acts"—*i.e.*, such as fill the beholder with holy awe. In ver. 5 *b* the phrase rendered above "records of His wonders" is literally "words of His wonders," which some regard as being like the similar phrase

in Psalm lxv. 3 (words or matters of iniquities), a pleonasm, and others would take as they do the like expression in Psalm cv. 27, as equivalent to "*deeds* of the Divine wonders" (Delitzsch). But "words" may very well here retain its ordinary sense, and the poet represent himself as meditating on the records of God's acts in the past as well as gazing on those spread before his eyes in the present.

His passing and repassing from his own praise in vv. 1, 2, to that of successive generations in ver. 4, and once more to his own in ver. 5, and to that of others in ver. 6, is remarkable. Does he conceive of himself as the chorus leader, teaching the ages his song? Or does he simply rejoice in the less lofty consciousness that his voice is not solitary? It is difficult to say, but this is clear, that the Messianic hope of the world's being one day filled with the praises which were occasioned by God's manifestation in Israel burned in this singer's heart. He could not bear to sing alone, and his hymn would lack its highest note, if he did not believe that the world was to catch up the song.

But greatness, majesty, splendour, are not the Divinest parts of the Divine nature, as this singer had learned. These are but the fringes of the central glory. Therefore the song rises from greatness to celebrate better things, the moral attributes of Jehovah (vv. 7–10). The psalmist has no more to say of himself, till the end of his psalm. He gladly listens rather to the chorus of many voices which proclaims Jehovah's widespread goodness. In ver. 7 the two attributes which the whole Old Testament regards as inseparable are the themes of the praise of men. Goodness and righteousness are not antithetic, but complementary, as green and red rays blend in white light. The exuberance of praise evoked

by these attributes is strikingly represented by the two strong words describing it; of which the former, "well forth," compares its gush to the clear waters of a spring bursting up into sunlight, dancing and flashing, musical and living, and the other describes it as like the shrill cries of joy raised by a crowd on some festival, or such as the women trilled out when a bride was brought home. Ver. 8 rests upon Exod. xxxiv. 6 (compare Psalm ciii. 8). It is difficult to de-synonymise "gracious" and "full of compassion." Possibly the former is the wider, and expresses love in exercise towards the lowly in its most general aspect, while the latter specialises graciousness as it reveals itself to those afflicted with any evil. As "slow to anger," Jehovah keeps back the wrath which is part of His perfection, and only gives it free course after long waiting and wooing. The contrast in ver. 8 *b* is not so much between anger and loving-kindness, which to the psalmist are not opposed, as between the slowness with which the one is launched against a few offenders and the plenitude of the other. That thought of abundant loving-kindness is still further widened, in ver. 9, to universality. God's goodness embraces all, and His compassions hover over all His works, as the broad wing and warm breast of the mother eagle protect her brood. Therefore the psalmist hears a yet more multitudinous voice of praise from all creatures; since their very existence, and still more their various blessednesses, give witness to the all-gladdening Mercy which encompasses them. But Creation's anthem is a song without words, and needs to be made articulate by the conscious thanksgivings of those who, being blessed by possession of Jehovah's loving-kindness, render blessing to Him with heart and lip.

The Kingship of God was lightly touched in ver. 1. It now becomes the psalmist's theme in vv. 11–13. It is for God's favoured ones to *speak*, while Creation can but *be*. It is for men who can recognise God's sovereign Will as their law, and know Him as Ruler, not only by power, but by goodness, to proclaim that kingdom which psalmists knew to be "righteousness, peace, and joy." The purpose for which God has lavished His favour on Israel is that they might be the heralds of His royalty to "the sons of men." The recipients of His grace should be the messengers of His grace. The aspects of that kingdom which fill the psalmist's thoughts in this part of his hymn, correspond with that side of the Divine nature celebrated in vv. 1–6—namely, the more majestic—while the graciousness magnified in vv. 7–10 is again the theme in the last portion (vv. 14–20). An intentional parallelism between the first and third parts is suggested by the recurrence in ver. 12 of part of the same heaped-together phrase which occurs in ver. 5. There we read of "the splendour of the glory of Thy majesty"; here of "the glory of the splendour of Thy kingdom,"—expressions substantially identical in meaning. The very glory of the kingdom of Jehovah is a pledge that it is eternal. What corruption or decay could touch so radiant and mighty a throne? Israel's monarchy was a thing of the past; but as, "in the year that King Uzziah died," Isaiah saw the true King of Israel throned in the Temple, so the vanishing of the earthly head of the theocracy seems to have revealed with new clearness to devout men in Israel the perpetuity of the reign of Jehovah. Hence the psalms of the King are mostly post-exilic. It is blessed when the shattering of earthly goods or the withdrawal of human helpers and lovers makes more

plain the Unchanging Friend and His abiding power to succour and suffice.

The last portion of the psalm is marked by a frequent repetition of "all," which occurs eleven times in these verses. The singer seems to delight in the very sound of the word, which suggests to him boundless visions of the wide sweep of God's universal mercy, and of the numberless crowd of dependents who wait on and are satisfied by Him. He passes far beyond national bounds.

Ver. 14 begins the grand catalogue of universal blessings by an aspect of God's goodness which, at first sight, seems restricted, but is only too wide, since there is no man who is not often ready to fall and needing a strong hand to uphold him. The universality of man's weakness is pathetically testified by this verse. Those who are in the act of falling are upheld by Him; those who have fallen are helped to regain their footing. Universal sustaining and restoring grace are His. The psalmist says nothing of the conditions on which that grace in its highest forms is exercised; but these are inherent in the nature of the case, for, if the falling man will not lay hold of the outstretched hand, down he must go. There would be no place for restoring help, if sustaining aid worked as universally as it is proffered. The word for "raises" in ver. 14 *b* occurs only here and in Psalm cxlvi. 8. Probably the author of both Psalms is one. In vv. 15, 16, the universality of Providence is set forth in language partly taken from Psalm civ. 27, 28. The petitioners are all creatures. They mutely appeal to God, with expectant eyes fixed on Him, like a dog looking for a crust from its master. He has but to "open His hand" and they are satisfied. The process is repre-

sented as easy and effortless. Ver. 16 *b* has received different explanations. The word rendered "desire" is often used for "favour"—*i.e.*, God's—and is by some taken in that meaning here. So Cheyne translates "fillest everything that lives with goodwill." But seeing that the same word recurs in ver. 19, in an obvious parallel with this verse, and has there necessarily the meaning of *desire*, it is more natural to give it the same signification here. The clause then means that the opening of God's hand satisfies every creature, by giving it that which it desires in full enjoyment.

These common blessings of Providence avail to interpret deeper mysteries. Since the world is full of happy creatures nourished by Him, it is a reasonable faith that His work is all of a piece, and that in all His dealings the twin attributes of righteousness and loving-kindness rule. There are enough plain tokens of God's character in plain things to make us sure that mysterious and apparently anomalous things have the same character regulating them. In ver. 17 *b* the word rendered *loving* is that usually employed of the objects of loving-kindness, God's "favoured ones." It is used of God only here and in Jer. iii. 12, and must be taken in an active sense, as *One who exercises loving-kindness*. The underlying principle of all His acts is Love, says the psalmist, and there is no antagonism between that deepest motive and Righteousness. The singer has indeed climbed to a sun-lit height, from which he sees far and can look down into the deep of the Divine judgments and discern that they are a clear-obscure.

He does not restrict this universal beneficence when he goes on to lay down conditions on which the reception of its highest forms depend. These con-

ditions are not arbitrary; and within their limits, the same universality is displayed. The lower creation makes its mute appeal to God, but men have the prerogative and obligation of calling upon Him with real desire and trust. Such suppliants will universally be blessed with a nearness of God to them, better than His proximity through power, knowledge, or the lower manifestations of His loving-kindness, to inferior creatures. Just as the fact of life brought with it certain wants, which God is bound to supply, since He gives it, so the fear and love of Him bring deeper needs, which He is still more (if that were possible) under pledge to satisfy. The creatures have their desires met. Those who fear Him will certainly have theirs; and that, not only in so far as they share physical life with worm and bee, whom their heavenly Father feeds, but in so far as their devotion sets in motion a new series of aspirations, longings, and needs, which will certainly not be left unfulfilled. "Food" is all the boon that the creatures crave, and they get it by an easy process. But man, especially man who fears and loves God, has deeper needs, sadder in one aspect, since they come from perils and ills from which he has to be saved, but more blessed in another, since every need is a door by which God can enter a soul. These sacreder necessities and more wistful longings are not to be satisfied by simply opening God's hand. More has to be done than that. For they can only be satisfied by the gift of Himself, and men need much disciplining before they will to receive Him into their hearts. They who love and fear Him will desire Him chiefly, and that desire can never be balked. There is a region, and only one, in which it is safe to set our hearts on unattained good. They who long

for God will always have as much of God as they long for and are capable of receiving.

But notwithstanding the universality of the Divine loving-kindness, mankind still parts into two sections, one capable of receiving the highest gifts, one incapable, because not desiring them. And therefore the One Light, in its universal shining, works two effects, being lustre and life to such as welcome it, but darkness and death to those who turn from it. It is man's awful prerogative that he can distil poison out of the water of life, and can make it impossible for himself to receive from tender, universal Goodness anything but destruction.

The singer closes his song with the reiterated vow that his songs shall never close, and, as in the earlier part of the psalm, rejoices in the confidence that his single voice shall, like that of the herald angel at Bethlehem, be merged in the notes of "a multitude praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest."

PSALM CXLVI.

1 Hallelujah!
Praise Jehovah, my soul.
2 I will praise Jehovah while I live,
I will harp to Jehovah as long as I exist.

3 Trust not in nobles,
In a son of Adam, who has no deliverance [to give].
4 His spirit goes forth, he returns to his earth,
In that same day his schemes perish.

5 Blessed he who has the God of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope is on Jehovah his God!
6 Who made heaven and earth,
The sea—and all that is in them;
Who keeps troth for ever;
7 Who executes judgment for the oppressed;
Who gives bread to the hungry.
Jehovah looses captives;
8 Jehovah opens the eyes of the blind;
Jehovah raises the bowed down;
Jehovah loves the righteous;
9 Jehovah preserves the strangers;
Orphans and widows He sets up;
But the way of the wicked He thwarts.
10 Jehovah shall be King for ever,
Thy God, O Zion, to generation after generation.
Hallelujah!

THE long-drawn music of the Psalter closes with five Hallelujah psalms, in which, with constantly swelling diapason, all themes of praise are pealed forth, until the melodious thunder of the final psalm, which calls on everything that has breath to praise Jehovah.

Possibly the number of these psalms may have reference to the five books into which the Psalter is divided.

This is the first of the five. It is largely coloured by earlier songs, but still throbs with fresh emotion. Its theme is the blessedness of trust in Jehovah, as shown by His character and works. It deals less with Israel's special prerogatives than its companions do, while yet it claims the universally beneficent Ruler as Israel's God.

The singer's full heart of thanksgiving must first pour itself out in vows of perpetual praise, before he begins to woo others to the trust which blesses him. Exhortations are impotent unless enforced by example. Ver. 2 is borrowed with slight variation from Psalm civ. 33.

The negative side of the psalmist's exhortation follows in vv. 3, 4, which warn against wasting trust on powerless men. The same antithesis between men and God as objects of confidence occurs in many places of Scripture, and here is probably borrowed from Psalm cxviii. 8. The reason assigned for the dehortation is mainly man's mortality. However high his state, he is but a "son of Adam" (the earth-born), and inherits the feebleness and fleetingness which deprive him of ability to help. "He has no salvation" is the literal rendering of the last words of ver. 3 *b*. Psalm lx. 11 gives the same thought, and almost in the same words. Ver. 4 sets forth more fully man's mortality, as demonstrating the folly of trusting in him. His breath or spirit escapes; he goes back to "his earth," from which he was created; and what becomes of all his busy schemes? They "perish" as he does. The psalmist has a profound sense of the phantasmal character of the solid-seeming realities of human glory and power. But it wakes no bitterness in him, nor does it breathe any sadness into his song. It only teaches him to

cling the more closely to the permanent and real. His negative teaching, if it stood alone, would be a gospel of despair, the reduction of life to a torturing cheat; but taken as the prelude to the revelation of One whom it is safe to trust, there is nothing sad in it. So the psalm springs up at once from these thoughts of the helplessness of mortal man, to hymn the blessedness of trust set upon the undying God, like a song-bird from its lair in a grave-yard, which pours its glad notes above the grassy mounds, as it rises in spirals towards the blue, and at each gives forth a more exultant burst of music.

The exclamation in ver. 5 is the last of the twenty-five "Blesseds" in the Psalter. Taken together, as any concordance will show, beginning with Psalm i., they present a beautiful and comprehensive ideal of the devout life. The felicity of such a life is here gathered up into two comprehensive considerations, which supplement each other. It is blessed to have the God of Jacob on our side; but it is not enough for the heart to know that He bore a relation to another in the far-off past or to a community in the present. There must be an individualising bond between the soul and God, whereby the "God of Jacob" becomes the God who belongs to the single devout man, and all the facts of whose protection in the past are renewed in the prosaic present. It is blessed to have Jehovah for one's "help," but that is only secured when, by the effort of one's own will, He is clasped as one's "hope." Such hope is blessed, for it will never be put to shame, nor need to shift its anchorage. It brings into any life the all-sufficient help which is the ultimate source of all felicity, and makes the hope that grasps it blessed, as the hand that holds some fragrant gum is perfumed by the touch.

But the psalmist passes swiftly from celebrating trust to magnify its object, and sets forth in an impressive series the manifold perfections and acts which witness that Jehovah is worthy to be the sole Confidence of men.

The nine Divine acts, which invite to trust in Him, are divided into two parts, by a change in construction. There is, first, a series of participles (vv. 6–7 *b*), and then a string of brief sentences enumerating Divine deeds (vv. 7 *c*–9). No very clear difference in thought can be established as corresponding to this difference in form. The psalmist begins with God's omnipotence as manifested in creation. The first requisite for trust is assurance of power in the person trusted. The psalmist calls heaven and earth and sea, with all their inhabitants, as witnesses that Jehovah is not like the son of man, in whom there is no power to help.

But power may be whimsical, changeable, or may shroud its designs in mystery; therefore, if it is to be trusted, its purposes and methods must be so far known that a man may be able to reckon on it. Therefore the psalm adds unchangeable faithfulness to His power. But Power, however faithful, is not yet worthy of trust, unless it works according to righteousness, and has an arm that wars against wrong; therefore to creative might and plighted troth the psalmist adds the exercise of judgment. Nor are these enough, for the conception which they embody may be that of a somewhat stern and repellent Being, who may be reverenced, but not approached with the warm heart of trust; therefore the psalmist adds beneficence, which ministers their appropriate food to all desires, not only of the flesh, but of the spirit. The hungry hearts of men, who are all full of needs and longings, may turn to this mighty, faithful,

righteous Jehovah, and be sure that He never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them. All our various kinds of hunger are doors for God to come into our spirits.

The second series of sentences deals mainly with the Divine beneficence in regard to man's miseries. The psalmist does not feel that the existence of these sad varieties of sorrow clouds his assurance in God's goodness. To him, they are occasions for the most heart-touching display of God's pitying, healing hand. If there is any difference between the two sets of clauses descriptive of God's acts, the latter bring into clearer light His personal agency in each case of suffering. This mighty, faithful, righteous, beneficent Jehovah, in all the majesty which that name suggests, comes down to the multitude of burdened ones and graciously deals with each, having in His heart the knowledge of, and in His hand the remedy for, all their ills. The greatness of His nature expressed by His name is vividly contrasted with the tenderness and lowliness of His working. Captives, blind persons, and those bowed down by sorrows or otherwise appeal to Him by their helplessness, and His strong hand breaks the fetters, and His gentle touch opens without pain the closed eyes and quickens the paralysed nerve to respond to the light, and His firm, loving hold lifts to their feet and establishes the prostrate. All these classes of afflicted persons are meant to be regarded literally, but all may have a wider meaning, and be intended to hint at spiritual bondage, blindness, and abjectness.

The next clause (ver. 8 *c*) seems to interrupt the representation of forms of affliction, but it comes in with great significance in the centre of that sad

catalogue; for its presence here teaches that not merely affliction, whether physical or other, secures Jehovah's gracious help, but that there must be the yielding of heart to Him, and the effort at conformity of life with His precepts and pattern, if His aid is to be reckoned on in men's sorrows. The prisoners will still languish in chains, the blind will grope in darkness, the bowed down will lie prone in the dust, unless they are righteous.

The series of afflictions which God alleviates is resumed in ver. 9 with a pathetic triad—strangers, widows, and fatherless. These are forlorn indeed, and the depth of their desolation is the measure of the Divine compassion. The enumeration of Jehovah's acts, which make trust in God blessed in itself, and the sure way of securing help which is not vain, needs but one more touch for completion, and that is added in the solemn thought that He, by His providences and in the long run, turns aside (*i.e.* from its aim) the way of the wicked. That aspect of God's government is lightly handled in one clause, as befits the purpose of the psalm. But it could not be left out. A true likeness must have shadows. God were not a God for men to rely on, unless the trend of His reign was to crush evil and thwart the designs of sinners.

The blessedness of trust in Jehovah is gathered up into one great thought in the last verse of the psalm, The sovereignty of God to all generations suggests the swift disappearance of earthly princes, referred to in ver. 4. To trust in fleeting power is madness; to trust in the Eternal King is wisdom and blessedness, and in some sense makes him who trusts a sharer in the eternity of the God in whom is his hope, and from whom is his help.

PSALM CXLVII.

1 Hallelujah!
For it is good to harp unto our God,
For it is pleasant: praise is comely.
2 Jehovah is the builder up of Jerusalem,
The outcasts of Israel He gathers together;
3 The healer of the broken-hearted,
And He binds their wounds;
4 Counting a number for the stars,
He calls them all by names.
5 Great is our Lord and of vast might,
To His understanding there is no number.
6 Jehovah helps up the afflicted,
Laying low the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to Jehovah with thanksgiving,
Harp to our God on the lyre,
8 Covering heaven with clouds,
Preparing rain for the earth;
Making the mountains shoot forth grass,
9 Giving to the beast its food,
To the brood of the raven which croak.
10 Not in the strength of the horse does He delight,
Not in the legs of a man does He take pleasure.
11 Jehovah takes pleasure in them that fear Him,
Them that wait for His loving-kindness.

12 Extol Jehovah, O Jerusalem,
Praise thy God, O Zion.
13 For He has strengthened the bars of thy gates,
He has blessed thy children in thy midst.
14 Setting thy borders in peace,
With the fat of wheat He satisfies thee;
15 Sending forth His commandment on the earth,
Swiftly runs His word;

16 Giving snow like wool,
Hoar frost He scatters like ashes;
17 Flinging forth His ice like morsels,
Before His cold who can stand?
18 He sends forth His word and melts them,
He causes His wind to blow—the waters flow;
19 Declaring His word to Jacob,
His statutes and judgments to Israel.
20 He has not dealt thus to any nation;
And His judgments—they have not known them.

THE threefold calls to praise Jehovah (vv. 1, 7, 12) divide this psalm into three parts, the two former of which are closely connected, inasmuch as the first part is mainly occupied with celebrating God's mercy to the restored Israel, and the second takes a wider outlook, embracing His beneficence to all living things. Both these points of view are repeated in the same order in the third part (vv. 12–20), which the LXX. makes a separate psalm. The allusions to Jerusalem as rebuilt, to the gathering of the scattered Israelites, and to the fortifications of the city naturally point to the epoch of the Restoration, whether or not, with Delitzsch and others, we suppose that the psalm was sung at the feast of the dedication of the new walls. In any case, it is a hymn of the restored people, which starts from the special mercy shown to them, and rejoices in the thought that "Our God" fills the earth with good and reigns to bless, in the realm of Nature as in that of special Revelation. The emphasis placed on God's working in nature, in this and others of these closing psalms, is probably in part a polemic against the idolatry which Israel had learned to abhor, by being brought face to face with it in Babylon, and in part a result of the widening of conceptions as to His relation to the world outside Israel which the

Exile had also effected. The two truths of His special relation to His people and of His universal loving-kindness have often been divorced, both by His people and by their enemies. This psalm teaches a more excellent way.

The main theme of vv. 1–6 is God's manifestation of transcendent power and incalculable wisdom, as well as infinite kindness, in building up the ruined Jerusalem and collecting into a happy band of citizens the lonely wanderers of Israel. For such blessings praise is due, and the psalm summons all who share them to swell the song. Ver. 1 is somewhat differently construed by some, as Hupfeld, who would change one letter in the word rendered above "to harp," and, making it an imperative, would refer "good" and "pleasant" to God, thus making the whole to read, "Praise Jehovah, for He is good; harp to our God, for He is pleasant: praise is comely." This change simplifies some points of construction, but labours under the objection that it is contrary to usage to apply the adjective "pleasant" to God; and the usual rendering is quite intelligible and appropriate. The reason for the fittingness and delightsomeness of praise is the great mercy shown to Israel in the Restoration, which mercy is in the psalmist's thoughts throughout this part. He has the same fondness for using participles as the author of the previous psalm, and begins vv. 2, 3, 4, and 6 with them. Possibly their use is intended to imply that the acts described by them are regarded as continuous, not merely done once for all. Jehovah is ever building up Jerusalem, and, in like manner, uninterruptedly energising in providence and nature. The collocation of Divine acts in ver. 2 bears upon the great theme that fills the singer's heart and lips. It is the outcasts

of Israel of whom he thinks, while he sings of binding up the broken-hearted. It is they who are the "afflicted," helped up by that strong, gentle clasp; while their oppressors are the wicked, flung prone by the very wind of God's hand. The beautiful and profound juxtaposition of gentle healing and omnipotence in vv. 3, 4, is meant to signalise the work of restoring Israel as no less wondrous than that of marshalling the stars, and to hearten faith by pledging that incalculable Power to perfect its restoring work. He who stands beside the sick-bed of the broken-hearted, like a gentle physician, with balm and bandage, and lays a tender hand on their wounds, is He who sets the stars in their places and tells them as a shepherd his flock or a commander his army. The psalmist borrows from Isa. xl. 26–29, where several of his expressions occur. "Counting a number for the stars" is scarcely equivalent to numbering them as they shine. It rather means determining how many of them there shall be. Calling them all by names (lit., He calls names to them all) is not giving them designations, but summoning them as a captain reading the muster-roll of his band. It may also imply full knowledge of each individual in their countless hosts. Ver. 5 is taken from the passage in Isaiah already referred to, with the change of "no number" for "no searching," a change which is suggested by the preceding reference to the number of the stars. These have a number, though it surpasses human arithmetic; but His wisdom is measureless. And all this magnificence of power, this minute particularising knowledge, this abyss of wisdom, are guarantees for the healing of the broken-hearted. The thought goes further than Israel's deliverance from bondage. It has a strong voice of cheer for all sad hearts, who will let

Him probe their wounds that He may bind them up. The mighty God of Creation is the tender God of Providence and of Redemption. Therefore "praise is comely," and fear and faltering are unbefitting.

The second part of the psalm (ver. 7–11) passes out from the special field of mercy to Israel, and comes down from the glories of the heavens, to magnify God's universal goodness manifested in physical changes, by which lowly creatures are provided for. The point of time selected is that of the November rains. The verbs in vv. 8, 9, 11, are again participles, expressive of continuous action. The yearly miracle which brings from some invisible storehouse the clouds to fill the sky and drop down fatness, the answer of the brown earth which mysteriously shoots forth the tender green spikelets away up on the mountain flanks, where no man has sown and no man will reap, the loving care which thereby provides food for the wild creatures, owned by no one, and answers the hoarse croak of the callow fledgelings in the ravens' nests—these are manifestations of God's power and revelations of His character worthy to be woven into a hymn which celebrates His restoring grace, and to be set beside the apocalypse of His greatness in the nightly heavens. But what has ver. 10 to do here? The connection of it is difficult to trace. Apparently, the psalmist would draw from the previous verses, which exhibit God's universal goodness and the creatures' dependence on Him, the lesson that reliance on one's own resources or might is sure to be smitten with confusion, while humble trust in God, which man alone of earth's creatures can exercise, is for him the condition of his receiving needed gifts. The beast gets its food, and it is enough that the young ravens

should croak, but man has to "fear Him" and to wait on His "loving-kindness." Ver. 10 is a reminiscence of Psalm xxxiii. 16, 17, and ver. 11 of the next verse of the same psalm.

The third part (vv. 12–20) travels over substantially the same ground as the two former, beginning with the mercy shown to the restored Israel, and passing on to wider manifestations of God's goodness. But there is a difference in this repeated setting forth of both these themes. The fortifications of Jerusalem are now complete, and their strength gives security to the people gathered into the city. Over all the land once devastated by war peace broods, and the fields that lay desolate now have yielded harvest. The ancient promise (Psalm lxxxi. 16) has been fulfilled, its condition having been complied with, and Israel having hearkened to Jehovah. Protection, blessing, tranquillity, abundance, are the results of obedience, God's gifts to them that fear Him. So it was in the psalmist's experience; so, in higher form, it is still. These Divine acts are continuous, and as long as there are men who trust, there will be a God who builds defences around them, and satisfies them with good.

Again the psalmist turns to the realm of nature; but it is nature at a different season which now yields witness to God's universal power and care. The phenomena of a sharp winter were more striking to the psalmist than to us. But his poet's eye and his devout heart recognise even in the cold, before which his Eastern constitution cowered shivering, the working of God's Will. His "commandment" or Word is personified, and compared to a swift-footed messenger. As ever, power over material things is attributed to the Divine word, and as ever, in the Biblical view of

nature, all intermediate links are neglected, and the Almighty cause at one end of the chain and the physical effect at the other are brought together. There is between these two clauses room enough for all that meteorology has to say.

The winter-piece in vv. 16, 17, dashes off the dreary scene with a few bold strokes. The air is full of flakes like floating wool, or the white mantle covers the ground like a cloth; rime lies everywhere, as if ashes were powdered over trees and stones. Hail-stones fall, as if He flung them down from above. They are like "morsels" of bread, a comparison which strikes us as violent, but which may possibly describe the more severe storms, in which flat pieces of ice fall. As by magic, all is changed when He again sends forth His word. It but needs that He should let a warm wind steal gently across the desolation, and every sealed and silent brook begins to tinkle along its course. And will not He who thus changes the face of the earth in like manner breathe upon frost-bound lives and hearts,

"And every winter merge in spring"?

But the psalm cannot end with contemplation of God's universal beneficence, however gracious that is. There is a higher mode of activity for His word than that exercised on material things. God sends His commandment forth and earth unconsciously obeys, and all creatures, men included, are fed and blessed. But the noblest utterance of His word is in the shape of statutes and judgments, and these are Israel's prerogative. The psalmist is not rejoicing that other nations have not received these, but that Israel has. Its privilege is its responsibility. It has received

them that it may obey them, and then that it may make them known. If the God who scatters lower blessings broad-cast, not forgetting beasts and ravens, has restricted His highest gift to His people, the restriction is a clear call to them to spread the knowledge of the treasure entrusted to them. To glory in privilege is sin; to learn that it means responsibility is wisdom. The lesson is needed by those who to-day have been served as heirs to Israel's prerogative, forfeited by it because it clutched it for itself, and forgot its obligation to carry it as widely as God had diffused His lower gifts.

PSALM CXLVIII.

1 Hallelujah!
Praise Jehovah from the heavens,
Praise Him in the heights.
2 Praise Him, all His angels,
Praise Him, all His host.
3 Praise Him, sun and moon,
Praise Him, all stars of light.
4 Praise Him, heavens of heavens,
And waters that are above the heavens—
5 Let them praise the name of Jehovah,
For He, He commanded and they were created.
6 And He established them for ever and aye,
A law gave He [them] and none transgresses.

7 Praise Jehovah from the earth,
Sea-monsters, and all ocean-depths;
8 Fire and hail, snow and smoke,
Storm-wind doing His behest;
9 Mountains and all hills,
Fruit trees and all cedars;
10 Wild beast and all cattle,
Creeping thing and winged fowl;
11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,
Princes and all judges of the earth;
12 Young men and also maidens,
Old men with children—
13 Let them praise the name of Jehovah,
For His name alone is exalted,
His majesty above earth and heaven.
14 And He has lifted up a horn for His people,
A praise for all His beloved,
[Even] for the children of Israel, the people near to Him
Hallelujah!

THE mercy granted to Israel (ver. 14) is, in the psalmist's estimation, worthy to call forth strains of praise from all creatures. It is the same conception as is found in several of the psalms of the King (xciii.–c.), but is here expressed with unparalleled magnificence and fervour. The same idea attains the climax of its representation in the mighty anthem from "every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them," whom John heard saying, "Blessing and honour and glory and power unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." It may be maintained that this psalm is only a highly emotional and imaginative rendering of the truth that all God's works praise Him, whether consciously or not, but its correspondence with a line of thought which runs through Scripture from its first page to its last—namely, that, as man's sin subjected the creatures to "vanity," so his redemption shall be their glorifying—leads us to see prophetic anticipation, and not mere poetic rapture, in this summons pealed out to heights and depths, and all that lies between, to rejoice in what Jehovah has done for Israel.

The psalm falls into two broad divisions, in the former of which heaven, and in the latter earth, are invoked to praise Jehovah. Ver. 1 addresses generally the subsequently particularised heavenly beings. "From the heavens" and "in the heights" praise is to sound: the former phrase marks the place of origin, and may imply the floating down to a listening earth of that ethereal music; the latter thinks of all the dim distances as filled with it. The angels, as conscious beings, are the chorus-leaders, and even to "principalities and powers in heavenly places" Israel's restoration reveals

new phases of the "manifold wisdom of God." The "host" (or *hosts*, according to the amended reading of the Hebrew margin) are here obviously angels, as required by the parallelism with *a*. The sun, moon, and stars, of which the psalmist knows nothing but that they burn with light and roll in silence through the dark expanse, are bid to break the solemn stillness that fills the daily and nightly sky. Finally, the singer passes in thought through the lower heavens, and would fain send his voice whither his eye cannot pierce, up into that mysterious watery abyss, which, according to ancient cosmography, had the firmament for its floor. It is absurd to look for astronomical accuracy in such poetry as this; but a singer who knew no more about sun, moon, and stars, and depths of space, than that they were all God's creatures and in their silence praised Him, knew and felt more of their true nature and charm than does he who knows everything about them except these facts.

Vv. 5, 6, assign the reason for the praise of the heavens —Jehovah's creative act, His sustaining power and His "law," the utterance of His will to which they conform. Ver. 6*a* emphatically asserts, by expressing the "He," which is in Hebrew usually included in the verb, that it is Jehovah and none other who "preserves the stars from wrong." "Preservation is continuous creation." The meaning of the close of ver. 6*b* is doubtful, if the existing text is adhered to. It reads literally "and [it?] shall not pass." The unexpressed nominative is by some taken to be the before-mentioned "law," and "pass" to mean *cease to be in force* or *be transgressed*. Others take the singular verb as being used distributively, and so render "None of them transgresses." But a very slight alteration gives the plural verb, which makes all plain.

In these starry depths obedience reigns; it is only on earth that a being lives who can and will break the merciful barriers of Jehovah's law. Therefore, from that untroubled region of perfect service comes a purer song of praise, though it can never have the pathetic harmonies of that which issues from rebels brought back to allegiance.

The summons to the earth begins with the lowest places, as that to the heavens did with the highest. The psalmist knows little of the uncouth forms that may wallow in ocean depths, but he is sure that they too, in their sunless abodes, can praise Jehovah. From the ocean the psalm rises to the air, before it, as it were, settles down on earth. Ver. 8 may refer to contemporaneous phenomena, and, if so, describes a wild storm hurtling through the lower atmosphere. The verbal arrangement in ver. 8*a* is that of inverted parallelism, in which "fire" corresponds to "smoke' and "hail" to "snow." Lightning and hail, which often occur together, are similarly connected in Psalm xviii. 12. But it is difficult to explain "snow and smoke," if regarded as accompaniments of the former pair—fire and hail. Rather they seem to describe another set of meteorological phenomena, a winter storm, in which the air is thick with flakes as if charged with smoke, while the preceding words refer to a summer's thunderstorm. The resemblance to the two pictures in the preceding psalm, one of the time of the latter rains and one of bitter winter weather, is noticeable. The storm-wind, which drives all these formidable agents through the air, in its utmost fury is a servant. As in Psalm cvii. 25, it obeys God's command.

The solid earth itself, as represented by its loftiest

summits which pierce the air; vegetable life, as represented by the two classes of fruit-bearing and forest trees; animals in their orders, wild and domestic; the lowest worm that crawls and the light-winged bird that soars,—these all have voices to praise God. The song has been steadily rising in the scale of being from inanimate to animated creatures, and last it summons man, in whom creation's praise becomes vocal and conscious.

All men, without distinction of rank, age, or sex, have the same obligation and privilege of praise. Kings are most kingly when they cast their crowns before Him. Judges are wise when they sit as His vicegerents. The buoyant vigour of youth is purest when used with remembrance of the Creator; the maiden's voice is never so sweet as in hymns to Jehovah. The memories and feebleness of age are hallowed and strengthened by recognition of the God who can renew failing energy and soothe sad remembrances; and the child's opening powers are preserved from stain and distortion, by drawing near to Him in whose praise the extremes of life find common ground. The young man's strong bass, the maiden's clear alto, the old man's quavering notes, the child's fresh treble, should blend in the song.

Ver. 13 gives the reason for the praise of earth, but especially of man, with very significant difference from that assigned in vv. 5, 6. "His name is exalted." He has manifested Himself to eyes that can see, and has shown forth His transcendent majesty. Man's praise is to be based not only on the Revelation of God in Nature, but on that higher one in His dealings with men, and especially with Israel. This chief reason for praise is assigned in ver. 14, and indeed underlies the

whole psalm. "He has lifted up a horn for His people," delivering them from their humiliation and captivity, and setting them again in their land. Thereby He has provided all His favoured ones with occasion for praise. The condensed language of ver. 14*b* is susceptible of different constructions and meanings. Some would understand the verb from *a* as repeated before "praise," and take the meaning to be "He exalts the praise [*i.e.*, the glory] of His beloved," but it is improbable that praise here should mean anything but that rendered to God. The simplest explanation of the words is that they are in apposition to the preceding clause, and declare that Jehovah, by "exalting a horn to His people," has given them especially occasion to praise Him. Israel is further designated as "a people near to Him." It is a nation of priests, having the privilege of access to His presence; and, in the consciousness of this dignity, "comes forward in this psalm as the leader of all the creatures in their praise of God, and strikes up a hallelujah that is to be joined in by heaven and earth" (Delitzsch).

PSALM CXLIX.

1 Sing to Jehovah a new song,
His praise in the congregation of His favoured ones.
2 Let Israel rejoice in his Maker,
Let the children of Zion be glad in their King.
3 Let them praise His name in [the] dance,
With timbrel and lyre let them play to Him.
4 For Jehovah takes pleasure in His people,
He adorns the meek with salvation.
5 Let His favoured ones exult in glory,
Let them shout aloud on their beds—
6 The high praises of God in their throat,
And a two-edged sword in their hand;
7 To execute vengeance on the nations,
Chastisements on the peoples;
8 To bind their kings in chains
And their nobles in bonds of iron;
9 To execute on them the sentence written—
An honour is this to all His favoured ones.
Hallelujah!

IN the preceding psalm Israel's restoration was connected with the recognition by all creatures, and especially by the kings of the earth and their people, of Jehovah's glory. This psalm presents the converse thought, that the restored Israel becomes the executor of judgments on those who will not join in the praise which rings from Israel that it may be caught up by all. The two psalms are thus closely connected. The circumstances of the Restoration accord with the tone of both, as of the other members of this closing group.

The happy recipients of new mercy are, as in Psalms xcvi. and xcviii., summoned to break into new songs. Winter silences the birds; but spring, the new "life re-orient out of dust," is welcomed with music from every budding tree.

Chiefly should God's praise sound out from "the congregation of His favoured ones," the long-scattered captives who owe it to His favour that they *are* a congregation once more. The jubilant psalmist delights in that name for Israel, and uses it thrice in his song. He loves to set forth the various names, which each suggest some sweet strong thought of what God is to the nation and the nation to God—His favoured ones, Israel, the children of Zion, His people, the afflicted. He heaps together synonyms expressive of rapturous joy—rejoice, be glad, exult. He calls for expressions of triumphant mirth in which limbs, instruments, and voices unite. He would have the exuberant gladness well over into the hours of repose, and the night be made musical with ringing shouts of joy. "Praise is better than sleep," and the beds which had often been privy to silent tears may well be witnesses of exultation that cannot be dumb.

The psalmist touches very lightly on the reason for this outburst of praise, because he takes it for granted that so great and recent mercy needed little mention. One verse (ver. 4) suffices to recall it. The very absorption of the heart in its bliss may make it silent about the bliss. The bride needs not to tell what makes her glad. Restored Israel requires little reminder of its occasion for joy. But the brief mention of it is very beautiful. It makes prominent, not so much the outward fact, as the Divine pleasure in His people, of which the fact was effect and indication.

Their affliction had been the token that God's complacency did not rest on them; their deliverance is the proof that the sunlight of His face shines on them once more. His chastisements rightly borne are ever precursors of deliverance, which adorns the meek afflicted, giving "beauty for ashes." The qualification for receiving Jehovah's help is meekness, and the effect of that help on the lowly soul is to deck it with strange loveliness. Therefore God's favoured ones may well exult in glory—*i.e.*, on account of the glory with which they are invested by His salvation.

The stern close of the psalm strikes a note which many ears feel to be discordant, and which must be freely acknowledged to stand on the same lower level as the imprecatory psalms, while, even more distinctly than these, it is entirely free from any sentiment of personal vengeance. The picture of God's people going forth to battle, chanting His praises and swinging two-edged swords, shocks Christian sentiment. It is not to be explained away as meaning the spiritual conquest of the world with spiritual weapons. The psalmist meant actual warfare and real iron fetters. But, while the form of his anticipations belongs to the past and is entirely set aside by the better light of Christianity, their substance is true for ever. Those who have been adorned with Jehovah's salvation have the subjugation of the world to God's rule committed to them. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." There are stronger fetters than those of iron, even "the cords of love" and "the bands of a man."

"The judgment written," which is to be executed by the militant Israel on the nations, does not seem to have reference either to the commandment to exterminate the Canaanites or to the punishments threatened

in many places of Scripture. It is better to take it as denoting a judgment "fixed, settled, . . . written thus by God Himself" (Perowne). Ver. 9*b* may be rendered (as Hupfeld does) "Honour [or, majesty] is He to all His favoured ones," in the sense that God manifests His majesty to them, or that He is the object of their honouring; but the usual rendering is more in accordance with the context and its high-strung martial ardour. "This"—namely, the whole of the crusade just described—is laid upon all Jehovah's favoured ones, by the fact of their participation in His salvation. They are redeemed from bondage that they may be God's warriors. The honour and obligation are universal.

PSALM CL.

Hallelujah!
Praise God in His sanctuary,
Praise Him in the firmament of His strength.
2 Praise Him for His mighty deeds,
Praise Him according to the abundance of His greatness.
3 Praise Him with blast of horn,
Praise Him with psaltery and harp,
4 Praise Him with timbrel and dance,
Praise Him with strings and pipe.
5 Praise Him with clear-sounding cymbals,
Praise Him with deep-toned cymbals.
6 Let everything that has breath praise Jah.
Hallelujah!

THIS noble close of the Psalter rings out one clear note of praise, as the end of all the many moods and experiences recorded in its wonderful sighs and songs. Tears, groans, wailings for sin, meditations on the dark depths of Providence, fainting faith and foiled aspirations, all lead up to this. The psalm is more than an artistic close of the Psalter; it is a prophecy of the last result of the devout life, and, in its unclouded sunniness, as well as in its universality, it proclaims the certain end of the weary years for the individual and for the world. "Everything that hath breath"

shall yet praise Jehovah. The psalm is evidently meant for liturgic use, and one may imagine that each instrument began to take part in the concert as it was named, till at last all blended in a mighty torrent of praiseful sound, to which the whirling dancers kept time. A strange contrast to modern notions of sobriety in worship!

The tenfold "Praise Him" has been often noticed as symbolic of completeness, but has probably no special significance.

In ver. 1 the psalmist calls on earth and heaven to praise. The "sanctuary" may, indeed, be either the Temple or the heavenly palace of Jehovah, but it is more probable that the invocation, like so many others of a similar kind, is addressed to men and angels, than that the latter only are meant. They who stand in the earthly courts and they who circle the throne that is reared above the visible firmament are parts of a great whole, an antiphonal chorus. It becomes them to praise, for they each dwell in God's sanctuary.

The theme of praise is next touched in ver. 2. "His mighty deeds" might be rendered "His heroic [or, valiant] acts." The reference is to His deliverance of His people as a signal manifestation of prowess or conquering might. The tenderness which moved the power is not here in question, but the power cannot be worthily praised or understood, unless that Divine pity and graciousness of which it is the instrument are apprehended. Mighty acts, unsoftened by loving impulse and gracious purpose, would evoke awe, but not thanks. No praise is adequate to the abundance of His greatness, but yet He accepts such adoration as men can render.

The instruments named in vv. 3–5 were not all used, so far as we know, in the Temple service. There is possibly an intention to go beyond those recognised as sacred, in order to emphasise the universality of praise. The horn was the curved "Shophar," blown by the priests; "harp and psaltery were played by the Levites, timbrels were struck by women; and dancing, playing on stringed instruments and pipes and cymbals, were not reserved for the Levites. Consequently the summons to praise God is addressed to priests, Levites, and people" (Baethgen). In ver. 4 *b* "strings" means stringed instruments, and "pipe" is probably that used by shepherds, neither of which kinds of instrument elsewhere appears as employed in worship.

Too little is known of Jewish music to enable us to determine whether the epithets applied to cymbals refer to two different kinds. Probably they do; the first being small and high-pitched, the second larger, like the similar instrument used in military music, and of a deep tone.

But the singer would fain hear a volume of sound which should drown all that sweet tumult which he has evoked; and therefore he calls on "everything that has breath" to use it in sending forth a thunder-chorus of praise to Jehovah. The invocation bears the prophecy of its own fulfilment. These last strains of the long series of psalmists are as if that band of singers of Israel turned to the listening world, and gave into its keeping the harps which, under their own hands, had yielded such immortal music.

Few voices have obeyed the summons, and the vision of a world melodious with the praise of Jehovah and of Him alone appears to us, in our despondent moments,

almost as far off as it was when the last psalmist ceased to sing. But his call is our confidence; and we know that the end of history shall be that to Him whose work is mightier than all the other mighty acts of Jehovah, "Every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

THE END.

THE

BOOK OF PROVERBS.

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CONTENTS.

PAGE

INTRODUCTION 1

I.

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM 9

II.

WISDOM AS THE GUIDE OF CONDUCT 24

III.

THE EARTHLY REWARDS OF WISDOM 37

IV.

EDUCATION: THE CHILD'S THOUGHT OF THE PARENT . 52

V.

THE WAYS AND ISSUES OF SIN 65

VI.

CERTAIN EXAMPLES OF THE BINDING CHARACTER OF OUR OWN ACTIONS 79

VII.

PAGE

REALISM IN MORAL TEACHING 92

VIII.

THE FIRST-BORN OF THE CREATOR 106

IX.

TWO VOICES IN THE HIGH PLACES OF THE CITY . . 122

X.

WEALTH 135

XI.

GOODNESS 149

XII.

THE TONGUE 163

XIII.

PRIDE AND HUMILITY 179

XIV.

THE INWARD UNAPPROACHABLE LIFE 191

XV.

A PASSIONATE DISPOSITION 203

XVI.

A JUST BALANCE 215

XVII.

PAGE

FRIENDSHIP 227

XVIII.

THE EVIL OF ISOLATION 239

XIX.

HUMAN FREEDOM 250

XX.

IDLENESS 262

XXI.

WINE 275

XXII.

THE TREATMENT OF THE POOR. 288

XXIII.

EDUCATION: THE PARENT'S THOUGHT OF THE CHILD . 303

XXIV.

FORGIVING 314

XXV.

THE KING 325

XXVI.

THE FOOL 337

XXVII.

PAGE

LIVING DAY BY DAY 350

XXVIII.

AN ASPECT OF ATONEMENT 362

XXIX.

THE NEED OF REVELATION 375

XXX.

THE WORDS OF AGUR 386

XXXI.

A GOOD WOMAN 396

INDEX OF PASSAGES 411

GENERAL INDEX 416

INTRODUCTION.

IN attempting to make the book of Proverbs a subject of Expository Lectures and practical sermons, it has been necessary to treat the book as a uniform composition, following, chapter by chapter, the order which the compiler has adopted, and bringing the scattered sentences together under subjects which are suggested by certain more striking points in the successive chapters. By this method the great bulk of the matter contained in the book is brought under review, either in the way of exposition or in the way of quotation and allusion, though even in this method many smaller sayings slip through the expositor's meshes. But the grave defect of the method which is thus employed is that it completely obliterates those interesting marks, discernible on the very surface of the book, of the origin and the compilation of the separate parts. This defect the reader can best supply by turning to Professor Cheyne's scholarly work "Job and Solomon; or, The Wisdom of the Old Testament;" but for those who have not time or opportunity to refer to any book besides the one which is in their hands, a brief Introduction to the following Lectures may not be unwelcome.

The Jewish tradition ascribed the Proverbs, or Sayings of the Wise, to Solomon, just as it ascribed

the Psalms, or inspired lyrics of the poets, to King David, and we may add, just as it ascribed all the gradual accretions and developments of the Law to Moses. But even a very uncritical reader will observe that the book of Proverbs as we have it is not the work of a single hand; and a critical inquiry into the language and style of the several parts, and also into the social and political conditions which are implied by them, has led scholars to the conclusion that, at the most, a certain number of Solomon's wise sayings are included in the collection, but that he did not in any sense compose the book. In fact, the statement in 1 Kings iv. 32, "He *spake* three thousand proverbs," implies that his utterances were recorded by others, and not written down by himself, and the heading to chap. xxv. of our book suggests that the "men of Hezekiah" collected the reputed sayings of Solomon from several sources, one of those sources being the collection contained in the previous chapters.[1]

The opening words, then, of the book—"The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, King of Israel"—are not to be taken as an assertion that all which follows flowed from Solomon's pen, but rather as a general description and key-note of the subject of the treatise. It is as if the compiler wished to say, 'This is a compendium of those wise sayings current among us, the model and type of which may be found in the proverbs attributed to the wisest of men, King Solomon.' That this is the way in which we must understand the

[1] *Cf.* xxv. 24 (xxi. 9), xxvi. 22 (xviii. 8), xxvii. 12 (xxii. 3), xxvii. 13 (xx. 16), xxvi. 13 (xxii. 13), xxvi. 15 (xix. 24), xxviii. 6 (xix. 1), xxviii. 19 (xii. 11), xxix. 13 (xxii. 2); to which add xxvii. 15 (xix. 13), xxvii. 21 (xvii. 3), xxix. 22 (xv. 18).

title becomes plain when we find contained in the book a passage described as "the sayings of the wise" (xxiv. 23-34), a chapter distinctly entitled "The Words of Agur," and another paragraph headed "The Words of King Lemuel."

Leaving aside the traditional view of the authorship, which the book itself shows to be misleading, the contents may be briefly delineated and characterized.

The main body of Proverbs is the collection which begins at chap. x., "The Proverbs of Solomon," and ends at xxii. 16. This collection has certain distinct features which mark it off from all that precedes and from all that follows. It is, strictly speaking, a collection of proverbs, that is of brief, pointed sayings,—sometimes containing a similitude, but more generally consisting of a single antithetical moral sentiment,—such as spring into existence and pass current in every society of men. All these proverbs are identical in form: each is expressed in a distich; the apparent exception in xix. 7 is to be explained by the obvious fact that the third clause is the mutilated fragment of another proverb, which in the LXX. appears complete: *ὁ πολλὰ κακοποιῶν τελεσιουργεῖ κακίαν, ὃς δὲ ἐρεθίζει λόγους οὐ σωθήσεται.* As the form is the same in all, so the general drift of their teaching is quite uniform; the morality inculcated is of no very lofty type; the motives for right conduct are mainly prudential; there is no sense of mystery or wonder, no tendency to speculation or doubt; "Be good, and you will prosper; be wicked, and you will suffer," is the sum of the whole. A few scattered precepts occur which seem to touch a higher level and to breathe a more spiritual air; and it is possible, as has been suggested, that these were added by the author of

chaps. i.-ix., when he revised and published the compilation. Such a sentiment as xiv. 34 well accords with the utterance of Wisdom in viii. 15, 16. And the series of proverbs which are grouped on the principle of their all containing the name of Jahveh, xv. 33-xvi. 7 (cf. xvi. 20, 33) seems to be closely linked with the opening chapters of the book. Assuming the proverbs of this collection to spring from the same period, and to reflect the social conditions which then prevailed, we should say that it points to a time of comparative simplicity and purity, when the main industry was that of tilling the soil, when the sayings of wise people were valued by an unsophisticated community, when the family life was pure, the wife honoured (xii. 4; xviii. 22; xix. 14), and parental authority maintained, and when the king was still worthy of respect, the immediate and obedient instrument of the Divine government (xxi. 1). The whole collection seems to date from the earlier and happier times of the monarchy.

To this collection is added an appendix (xxii. 17-xxiv. 22), which opens with an exhortation addressed by the teacher to his pupil. The literary form of this appendix falls far behind the style of the main collection. The terse and compact distich occurs rarely; most of the sayings are more cumbrous and elaborate, and in one case there is a brief didactic poem carried through several verses (xxiii. 29-35). As the style of composition shows a decline, so the general conditions which form the background of the sayings are less happy. They seem to indicate a time of growing luxury; gluttony and drunkenness are the subjects of strong invective. It appears that the poor are oppressed by the rich (xxii. 22), and justice is not

rightly administered, so that the innocent are carried away into confinement (xxiv. 11, 12). There is political unrest, too, and the young have to be cautioned against the revolutionary or anarchical spirit (xxiv. 21). We are evidently brought down to a later period in Israel's melancholy history.

Another brief appendix follows (xxiv. 23-34), in which the distich form almost entirely disappears; it is remarkable as containing a little picture (30-34), which, like the much longer passage in vii. 6-27, is presented as the personal observation of the writer.

We now pass on to an entirely new collection, ch. xxv.-xxix., which was made, we are told, in the literary circle at the court of Hezekiah, two hundred and fifty years or thereabouts after the time of Solomon. In this collection there is no uniformity of structure such as distinguished the proverbs of the first collection. Some distichs occur, but as often as not the proverb is drawn out into three, four, and in one case (xxv. 6, 7) five clauses; xxvii. 23-27 forms a brief connected exhortation, which is a considerable departure from the simple structure of the *mashal*, or proverb. The social condition reflected in these chapters is not very attractive; it is clear that the people have had experience of a bad ruler (xxix. 2); we seem to have hints of the many troubled experiences through which the monarchy of Israel passed—the divided rule, the injustice, the incapacity, the oppression (xxviii. 2, 3, 12, 15, 16, 28). There is one proverb which particularly recalls the age of Hezekiah, when the doom of the exile was already being proclaimed by the prophets: "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place" (xxvii. 8). And it is perhaps charac-

teristic of that troubled time, when the spiritual life was to be deepened by the experience of material suffering and national disaster, that this collection contains a proverb which might be almost the key-note of the New Testament morality (xxv. 21, 22).

The book closes with three quite distinct passages, which can only be regarded as appendices. According to one interpretation of the very difficult words which stand at the head of chaps. xxx. and xxxi., these paragraphs would come from a foreign source; it has been thought that the word translated "oracle" might be the name of the country mentioned in Gen. xxv. 14, Massa. But whether Jakeh and King Lemuel were natives of this shadowy land or not, it is certain that the whole tone and drift of these two sections are alien to the general spirit of the book. There is something enigmatical in their style and artificial in their form, which would suggest a very late period in Israel's literary history. And the closing passage, which describes the virtuous woman, is distinguished by being an alphabetical acrostic, the verses beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, a kind of composition which points to the dawn of Rabbinical methods in literature. It is impossible to say when or how these curious and interesting additions were made to our book, but scholars have generally recognized them as the product of the exile, if not the post-exile, period.

Now, the two collections which have been described, with their several appendices, were at some favourable point in religious history, possibly in those happy days of Josiah when the Deuteronomic Law was newly promulgated to the joyful nation, brought together, and, as we should say now, edited, with an original intro-

duction by an author who, unknown to us by name, is among the greatest and noblest of Biblical writers. The first nine chapters of the book, which form the introduction to the whole, strike a far higher note, appeal to nobler conceptions, and are couched in a much loftier style than the book itself. The writer bases his moral teaching on Divine authority rather than on the utilitarian basis which prevails in most of the proverbs. Writing in a time when the temptations to a lawless and sensual life were strong, appealing to the wealthier and more cultured youth of the nation, he proceeds in sweet and earnest discourse to woo his readers from the paths of vice into the Temple of Wisdom and Virtue. His method of contrasting the "two ways," and exhorting men to shun the one and choose the other, constantly reminds us of the similar appeals in the Book of Deuteronomy; but the touch is more graphic and more vivid; the gifts of the poet are employed in depicting the seven-pillared House of Wisdom and the deadly ways of Folly; and in the wonderful passage which introduces Wisdom appealing to the sons of men, on the ground of the part which she plays in the Creation and by the throne of God, we recognize the voice of a prophet—a prophet, too, who holds one of the highest places in the line of those who foretold the coming of our Lord.

Impossible as it has been in the Lectures to bring out the history and structure of the book, it will greatly help the reader to bear in mind what has just been said; he will thus be prepared for the striking contrast between the glowing beauty of the introduction and the somewhat frigid precepts which occur so frequently among the Proverbs themselves; he will be able to appreciate more fully the point which is from time

to time brought into relief, that much of the teaching contained in the book is crude and imperfect, of value for us only when it has been brought to the standard of our Lord's spirit, corrected by His love and wisdom, or infused with His Divine life. And especially as the reader approaches those strange chapters "The Sayings of Agur" and "The Sayings of King Lemuel" he will be glad to remind himself of the somewhat loose relation in which they stand to the main body of the work.

In few parts of the Scripture is there more need than in this of the ever-present Spirit to interpret and apply the written word, to discriminate and assort, to arrange and to combine, the varied utterances of the ages. Nowhere is it more necessary to distinguish between the inspired speech, which comes to the mind of prophet or poet as a direct oracle of God, and the speech which is the product of human wisdom, human observation, and human common sense, and is only in that secondary sense inspired. In the book of Proverbs there is much which is recorded for us by the wisdom of God, not because it is the expression of God's wisdom, but distinctly because it is the expression of man's wisdom; and among the lessons of the book is the sense of limitation and incompleteness which human wisdom leaves upon the mind.

But under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the reader may not only learn from the Proverbs much practical counsel for the common duties of life; he may have, from time to time, rare and wonderful glimpses into the heights and depths of God.

I.

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."—PROV. i. 7.
"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."—PROV. ix. 10.
(*Cf.* Eccles. i. 14, "To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and it was created with the faithful in the womb;" also Ps. cxi. 10.)

THE book of Proverbs belongs to a group of works in the Hebrew literature the subject of which is Wisdom. It is probably the earliest of them all, and may be regarded as the stem, of which they are the branches. Without attempting to determine the relative ages of these compositions, the ordinary reader can see the points of contact between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and a little careful study reveals that the book of Job, though fuller and richer in every respect, belongs to the same order. Outside the canon of Holy Scripture we possess two works which avowedly owe their suggestion and inspiration to our book, viz. "The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach," commonly called Ecclesiasticus, a genuinely Hebrew product, and "The Wisdom of Solomon," commonly called the Book of Wisdom, of much later origin, and exhibiting that fusion of Hebrew religious conceptions with Greek speculation which prevailed in the Jewish schools of Alexandria.

Now, the question at once occurs, What are we to understand by the Wisdom which gives a subject and a title to this extensive field of literature? and in what relation does it stand to the Law and the Prophets, which form the great bulk of the Old Testament Scriptures?

Broadly speaking, the Wisdom of the Hebrews covers the whole domain of what we should call Science and Philosophy. It is the consistent effort of the human mind to know, to understand, and to explain all that exists. It is, to use the modern phrase, the search for truth. The "wise men" were not, like Moses and the Prophets, inspired legislators and heralds of God's immediate messages to mankind; but rather, like the wise men among the earlier Greeks, Thales, Solon, Anaximenes, or like the Sophists among the later Greeks, Socrates and his successors, they brought all their faculties to bear in observing the facts of the world and of life, and in seeking to interpret them, and then in the public streets or in appointed schools endeavoured to communicate their knowledge to the young. Nothing was too high for their inquiry: "*That which is* is far off, and exceeding deep; who can find it out?"[1] yet they tried to discover and to explain *that which is*. Nothing was too lowly for their attention; wisdom "reaches from one end to another mightily, and sweetly orders all things."[2] Their purpose finds expression in the words of Ecclesiastes, "I turned about, and my heart was set to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason of things."[3]

But by Wisdom is meant not merely the search, but also the discovery; not merely a desire to know, but

[1] Eccl. vii. 24. [2] Wisdom viii. 1. [3] Eccl. vii. 25.

also a certain body of conceptions ascertained and sufficiently formulated. To the Hebrew mind it would have seemed meaningless to assert that Agnosticism was wisdom. It was saved from this paradoxical conclusion by its firmly rooted faith in God. Mystery might hang over the details, but one thing was plain: the whole universe was an intelligent plan of God; the mind might be baffled in understanding His ways, but that all existence is of His choosing and His ordering was taken as the axiom with which all thought must start. Thus there is a unity in the Hebrew Wisdom; the unity is found in the thought of the Creator; all the facts of the physical world, all the problems of human life, are referred to His mind; objective Wisdom is God's Being, which includes in its circle everything; and subjective wisdom, wisdom in the human mind, consists in becoming acquainted with His Being and all that is contained in it, and meanwhile in constantly admitting that He *is*, and yielding to Him the rightful place in our thought.

But while Wisdom embraces in her wide survey all things in heaven and in earth, there is one part of the vast field which makes a special demand upon human interest. The proper study of mankind is man. Very naturally the earliest subject to occupy human thought was human life, human conduct, human society. Or, to say the same thing in the language of this book, while Wisdom was occupied with the whole creation, she specially rejoiced in the habitable earth, and her delight was with the sons of men.

Theoretically embracing all subjects of human knowledge and reflection, the Wisdom of the Hebrew literature practically touches but little on what we should

now call Science, and even where attention was turned to the facts and laws of the material world, it was mainly in order to borrow similitudes or illustrations for moral and religious purposes. King Solomon "spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes."[1] But the Proverbs which have actually come down to us under his name refer almost exclusively to principles of conduct or observation of life, and seldom remind us of the earth, the sea, and the sky, except as the dwelling-place of men, the house covered with paintings for his delight or filled with imagery for his instruction.

But there is a further distinction to be drawn, and in attempting to make it plain we may determine the place of the Proverbs in the general scheme of the inspired writings. Human life is a sufficiently large theme; it includes not only social and political questions, but the searchings and speculations of philosophy, the truths and revelations of religion. From one point of view, therefore, wisdom may be said to embrace the Law and the Prophets, and in a beautiful passage of Ecclesiasticus[2] the whole covenant of Jehovah with

[1] 1 Kings iv. 33.

[2] In this passage Wisdom is represented saying—

"I from the mouth of the Highest came forth, and as vapour I veiled the earth;

I in the heights pitched my tent, my throne in a pillar of cloud;

I alone circled the ring of heaven, and walked in the depths of abysses;

In the waves of the sea, and in all the earth, and in every people and race I obtained a possession;

With all these I sought a rest (saying), In whose inheritance shall I settle?

Israel is treated as an emanation of wisdom from the mouth of the Most High. Wisdom was the inspiration of those who shaped the law and built the Holy House, of those who ministered in the courts of the Temple, and of those who were moved by the Holy One to chide the faults of the people, to call them to repentance, to denounce the doom of their sin, and proclaim the glad promise of deliverance. Again, from this large point of view Wisdom could be regarded as the Divine Philosophy, the system of thought and the body of beliefs which would furnish the explanation of life, and would root all the decisions of ethics in eternal principles of truth. And this function of Wisdom is presented with singular beauty and power in the eighth chapter of our book, where, as we shall see, the mouth of Wisdom shows that her concern with men is derived from her relation with the Creator and from her comprehension of His great architectural design in the construction of the world.

Now, the wisdom which finds expression in the bulk of the Proverbs must be clearly distinguished from wisdom in this exalted sense. It is not the wisdom of the Law and the Prophets; it moves in a much lower plane. It is not the wisdom of chap. viii., a philosophy

Then came to me the command of the Creator of all; my Creator pitched my tent; and He said,

In Jacob pitch thy tent, in Israel find thine inheritance.

Before the world was, in the beginning He created me, and while the world lasts I shall not fail:

In the holy tent before Him I offered service, and thus in Sion I was planted;

In the beloved city He likewise made me rest, and in Israel is my power;

And I took root in a people that is glorified, in a portion of the Lord His inheritance."—Eccles. xxiv. 3.

which harmonizes human life with the laws of nature by constantly connecting both with God.

The wisdom of the Proverbs differs from the wisdom of the Prophets in this, that it is derived not directly, but mediately from God. No special mind is directed to shape these sayings; they grow up in the common mind of the people, and they derive their inspiration from those general qualities which made the whole nation in the midst of which they had their birth an inspired nation, and gave to all the literature of the nation a peculiar and inimitable tone. The wisdom of the Proverbs differs, too, from the wisdom of these introductory chapters in much the same way; it is a difference which might be expressed by a familiar use of words; it is a distinction between Philosophy and Proverbial Philosophy, a distinction, let us say, between Divine Philosophy and Proverbial Philosophy.

The Proverbs are often shrewd, often edifying, sometimes almost evangelical in their sharp ethical insight; but we shall constantly be reminded that they do not come with the overbearing authority of the prophetic "Thus saith the Lord." And still more shall we be reminded how far they lag behind the standard of life and the principles of conduct which are presented to us in Christ Jesus.

What has just been said seems to be a necessary preliminary to the study of the Proverbs, and it is only by bearing it in mind that we shall be able to appreciate the difference in tone between the nine introductory chapters and the main body of the book; nor should we venture, perhaps, apart from the consideration which has been urged to exercise our critical sense in the study of particular sayings, and to insist at all points

on bringing the teaching of the wise men of old to the standard and test of Him who is Himself made unto us Wisdom.

But now to turn to our text. We must think of wisdom in the largest possible sense, as including not only ethics, but philosophy, and not only philosophy, but religion; yes, and as embracing in her vast survey the whole field of natural science, when it is said that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;* we must think of knowledge in its fullest and most liberal extent when we read that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*

In this pregnant truth we may distinguish three ideas: *first,* fear, or, as we should probably say, reverence, is the pre-requisite of all scientific, philosophical, or religious truth; *second,* no real knowledge or wisdom can be attained which does not start with the recognition of God; and then, *thirdly,* the expression is not only "the fear of God," which might refer only to the Being that is presupposed in any intelligent explanation of phenomena, but the "fear of the Lord," *i.e.* of Jahveh, the self-existent One, who has revealed Himself in a special way to men as "I AM WHAT I AM;" and it is therefore hinted that no satisfactory philosophy of human life and history can be constructed which does not build upon the fact of revelation.

We may proceed to dwell upon these three thoughts in order.

1. Most religious people are willing to admit that "the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."[1] But what is not always

[1] Prov. xiv. 27.

observed is that the same attitude is necessary in the intellectual sphere. And yet the truth may be illustrated in a quarter which to some of us may be surprising. It is a notable fact that Modern Science had its origin in two deeply religious minds. Bacon and Descartes were both stirred to their investigation of physical facts by their belief in the Divine Being who was behind them. To mention only our great English thinker, Bacon's *Novum Organum* is the most reverent of works, and no one ever realized more keenly than he that, as Coleridge used to say, "there is no chance of truth at the goal where there is not a childlike humility at the starting-point."

It is sometimes said that this note of reverence is wanting in the great scientific investigators of our day. So far as this is true, it is probable that their conclusions will be vitiated, and we are often impressed by the feeling that the unmannerly self-assertion and overweening self-confidence of many scientific writers augur ill for the truth of their assertions. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that the greatest men of science in our own, as in all other ages, are distinguished by a singular simplicity, and by a reverence which communicates itself to their readers. What could be more reverent than Darwin's way of studying the coral-insect or the earth-worm? He bestowed on these humble creatures of the ocean and of the earth the most patient and loving observation. And his success in understanding and explaining them was in proportion to the respect which he showed to them. The coral-diver has no reverence for the insect; he is bent only on gain, and he consequently can tell us nothing of the coral reef and its growth. The gardener has no re-

verence for the worm; he cuts it ruthlessly with his spade, and flings it carelessly aside; accordingly he is not able to tell us of its lowly ministries and of the part it plays in the fertilization of the soil. It was Darwin's reverence which proved to be the beginning of knowledge in these departments of investigation; and if it was only the reverence of the naturalist, the truth is illustrated all the better, for his knowledge of the unseen and the eternal dwindled away, just as his perception of beauty in literature and art declined, in proportion as he suffered his spirit of reverence towards these things to die.

The gates of Knowledge and Wisdom are closed, and they are opened only to the knock of Reverence. Without reverence, it is true, men may gain what is called worldly knowledge and worldly wisdom; but these are far removed from truth, and experience often shows us how profoundly ignorant and how incurably blind pushing and successful people are, whose knowledge is all turned to delusion, and whose wisdom shifts round into folly, precisely because the great pre-requisite was wanting. The seeker after real knowledge will have little about him which suggests worldly success. He is modest, self-forgetful, possibly shy; he is absorbed in a disinterested pursuit, for he has seen afar the high, white star of Truth; at it he gazes, to it he aspires. Things which only affect him personally make but little impression on him; things which affect the truth move, agitate, excite him. A bright spirit is on ahead, beckoning to him. The colour mounts to his cheek, the nerves thrill, and his soul is filled with rapture, when the form seems to grow clearer and a step is gained in the pursuit. When a discovery is made he almost forgets that he

is the discoverer; he will even allow the credit of it to pass over to another, for he would rather rejoice in the truth itself than allow his joy to be tinged with a personal consideration.

Yes, this modest, self-forgetful, reverent mien is the first condition of winning Truth, who must be approached on bended knee, and recognized with a humble and a prostrate heart. There is no gainsaying the fact that this fear, this reverence, is the beginning of wisdom.

2. We pass now to an assertion bolder than the last, that *there can be no true knowledge or wisdom which does not start from the recognition of God.* This is one of those contentions, not uncommon in the Sacred Writings, which appear at first sight to be arbitrary dogmas, but prove on closer inquiry to be the authoritative statements of reasoned truth. We are face to face, in our day, with an avowedly atheistic philosophy. According to the Scriptures, an atheistic philosophy is not a philosophy at all, but only a folly: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." We have thinkers among us who deem it their great mission to get rid of the very idea of God, as one which stands in the way of spiritual, social, and political progress. According to the Scriptures, to remove the idea of God is to destroy the key of knowledge and to make any consistent scheme or thought impossible. Here certainly is a clear and sharp issue.

Now, if this universe of which we orm a part is a thought of the Divine mind, a work of the Divine hand, a scene of Divine operations, in which God is realizing, by slow degrees, a vast spiritual purpose, it is self-evident that no attempt to understand the universe can

be successful which leaves this, its fundamental idea, out of account; as well might one attempt to understand a picture while refusing to recognize that the artist had any purpose to express in painting it, or indeed that there was any artist at all. So much every one will admit.

But if the universe is not the work of a Divine mind, or the effect of a Divine will; if it is merely the working of a blind, irrational Force, which realizes no end, because it has no end to realize; if we, the feeble outcome of a long, unthinking evolution, are the first creatures that ever *thought*, and the only creatures who now *think*, in all the universe of Being; it follows that of a universe so irrational there can be no true knowledge for rational beings, and of a scheme of things so unwise there can be no philosophy or wisdom. No person who reflects can fail to recognize this, and this is the truth which is asserted in the text. It is not necessary to maintain that without admitting God we cannot have knowledge of a certain number of empirical facts; but that does not constitute a philosophy or a wisdom. It is necessary to maintain that without admitting God we cannot have any explanation of our knowledge, or any verification of it; without admitting God our knowledge can never come to any roundness or completeness such as might justify our calling it by the name of Wisdom.

Or to put the matter in a slightly different way: a thinking mind can only conceive the universe as the product of thought; if the universe is not the product of thought it can never be intelligible to a thinking mind, and can therefore never be in a true sense the object of knowledge; to deny that the universe is the product of thought is to deny the possibility of wisdom.

We find, then, that it is not a dogma, but a truth of reason, that knowledge must start with the recognition of God.

3. But now we come to an assertion which is the boldest of all, and for the present we shall have to be content to leave behind many who have readily followed us so far. That we are bound to recognize "the Lord," that is the God of Revelation, and bow down in reverence before Him, as the first condition of true wisdom, is just the truth which multitudes of men who claim to be Theists are now strenuously denying. Must we be content to leave the assertion merely as a dogma enunciated on the authority of Scripture?

Surely they, at any rate, who have made the beginning of wisdom in the fear of the Lord should be able to show that the possession which they have gained is actually wisdom, and does not rest upon an irrational dogma, incapable of proof.

We have already recognized at the outset that the Wisdom of this book is not merely an intellectual account of the reason of things, but also more specifically an explanation of the moral and spiritual life. It may be granted that so far as the Intellect alone claims satisfaction it is enough to posit the bare idea of God as the condition of all rational existence. But when men come to recognize themselves as Spiritual Beings, with conceptions of right and wrong, with strong affections, with soaring aspirations, with ideas which lay hold of Eternity, they find themselves quite incapable of being satisfied with the bare idea of God; the soul within them pants and thirsts for a *living* God. An intellectual love of God might satisfy purely intellectual creatures; but to meet the needs of man as he is, God must be a

God that manifests His own personality, and does not leave Himself without a witness to His rational creature. A wisdom, then, that is to truly appraise and rightly guide the life of man must start with the recognition of a God whose peculiar designation is the Self-existent One, and who makes Himself known to man by that name; that is, it must start with the "fear of *the Lord*." [1]

How cogent this necessity is appears directly the alternative is stated. If Reason assures us of a God that made us, a First Cause of our existence and of our being what we are; if Reason also compels us to refer to Him our moral nature, our desire of holiness, and our capacity of love, what could be a greater tax on faith, and even a greater strain on the reason, than to declare that, notwithstanding, God has not revealed Himself as the Lord of our life and the God of our salvation, as the authority of righteousness or the object of our love? When the question is stated in this way it appears that apart from a veritable and trustworthy revelation there can be no wisdom which is capable of really dealing with human life, as the life of spiritual and moral creatures; for a God who does not reveal Himself would be devoid of the highest qualities of the human spirit, and the belief in a God who is inferior to man, a Creator who is less than the creature, could furnish no foundation for an intelligible system of thought.

Our text now stands before us, not as the unsup-

[1] It may be well to remind the reader who is too familiar with the name "the Lord" to consider its significance; that "the Lord" is the English translation of that peculiar name, Jahveh, by which God revealed Himself to Moses, and the term Jahveh seems to convey one of two ideas, existence or the cause of existence, according to the vowel-pointing of the consonants יהוה

ported deliverance of dogma, but as a condensed utterance of the human reason. We see that starting from the conception of Wisdom as the sum of that which is, and the sufficient explanation of all things, as including therefore not only the laws of nature, but also the laws of human life, both spiritual and moral, we can make no step towards the acquisition of wisdom without a sincere and absolute reverence, a recognition of God as the Author of the universe which we seek to understand, and as the Personal Being, the Self-existent One, who reveals Himself under that significant name "I AM," and declares His will to our waiting hearts. "To whom hath the root of Wisdom been revealed? or who hath known her wise counsels? There is one wise, and greatly to be feared, the Lord sitting upon His throne."[1]

In this way is struck the key-note of the Jewish "Wisdom." It is profoundly true; it is stimulating and helpful. But it may not be out of place to remind ourselves even thus early that the idea on which we have been dwelling comes short of the higher truth which has been given us in Christ. It hardly entered into the mind of a Hebrew thinker to conceive that "fear of the Lord" might pass into full, whole-hearted, and perfect love. And yet it may be shown that this was the change effected when Christ was of God "made unto us Wisdom;" it is not that the "fear," or reverence, becomes less, but it is that the fear is swallowed up in the larger and more gracious sentiment. For us who have received Christ as our Wisdom, it has become almost a truism that we must love in

[1] Eccles. i. 6. 8.

order to know. We recognize that the causes of things remain hidden from us until our hearts have been kindled into an ardent love towards the First Cause, God Himself: we find that even our processes of reasoning are faulty until they are touched with the Divine tenderness, and rendered sympathetic by the infusion of a loftier passion. And it is quite in accordance with this fuller truth that both science and philosophy have made genuine progress only in Christian lands and under Christian influences. Where the touch of Christ's hand has been most decisively felt, in Germany, in England, in America, and where consequently Wisdom has attained a nobler, a richer, a more tender significance, there, under fostering powers, which are not the less real because they are not always acknowledged, the great discoveries have been made, the great systems of thought have been framed, and the great counsels of conduct have gradually assumed substance and authority. And from a wide observation of facts we are able to say, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge;" yes, but the Wisdom of God has led us on from fear to love, and in the Love of the Lord is found the fulfilment of that which trembled into birth through fear.

II.

WISDOM AS THE GUIDE OF CONDUCT.

"To deliver thee from the way of the evil man. . . .
To deliver thee from the strange woman."—PROV. ii. 12*a*-16*a*.

WISDOM is concerned, as we have seen, with the whole universe of fact, with the whole range of thought; she surveys and orders all processes of nature. We might say of her,

"She doth preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens by her are fresh and strong."

But while she is occupied in these high things, she is no less attentive to the affairs of human life, and her delight is to order human conduct, not despising even the smallest detail of that which is done by men under the sun. Side by side with physical laws, indeed often intertwined with them, appear the moral laws which issue from the lively oracles of Wisdom. There is not one authority for natural phenomena, and another for mental and moral phenomena. As we should say now, Truth is one: Science is one: Law is one. The laws of the physical order, the laws of the speculative reason, the laws of practical life, form a single system, come from the sole mind of God, and are the impartial interests of Wisdom.

As the great authority on *Conduct*, Wisdom is pictured standing in the places where men congregate where

the busy hum of human voices and the rush of hurried feet make it necessary for her to lift up her voice in order to gain attention. With words of winsome wooing—"for wisdom shall enter into thy heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant unto thy soul"[1]—or with loud threats and stern declarations of truth—"the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them"[2]—she tries to win us, while we are yet young, to her paths of pleasantness and her ways of peace. Her object is to deliver youth, (1) from the evil man, and (2) from the evil woman, or in the most comprehensive way "to deliver us from evil."

First of all, we may spend a few moments in noting the particular temptations to which men were exposed in the days when these chapters were written.[3] There was a temptation to join a troop of banditti, and to obtain a living by acts of highway robbery which would frequently result in murder; and there was the temptation to the sin which we call specifically Impurity, a temptation which arose not so much from the existence of a special class of fallen women, as from the shocking looseness and voluptuousness of married women in well-to-do circumstances.

Society under the kings never seems to have reached anything approaching to an ordered security. We cannot point to any period when the mountain roads, even in the neighbourhood of the capital, were not haunted by thieves, who lurked in the rocks or the copses, and fell upon passing travellers, to strip and to

[1] Prov. ii. 10. [2] Prov. i. 32.

[3] We may remind ourselves that, according to the most probable conjecture, this introduction to Solomon's Proverbs (chaps. i.-ix.) dates from the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.).

rob, and if need be to kill them. When such things are done, when such things are even recounted in sensational literature, there are multitudes of young men who are stirred to a debased ambition; a spurious glory encircles the brow of the adventurer who sets the laws of society at defiance; and without any personal entreaty the foolish youth is disposed to leave the quiet ways of industry for the stimulating excitement and the false glamour of the bandit life. The reckless plottings of the robbers are described in chap. i. 11-14. The character of the men themselves is given in iv. 16, 17: "They sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence." The proverb in xxiv. 15 is addressed to such an one: "Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the habitation of the righteous; spoil not his resting-place."

The rebukes of the prophets—Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah—may have a wider application, but they seem at any rate to include this highwayman's life. "Your hands are full of blood" is the charge of Isaiah;[1] and again, "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity."[2] "They build up Zion with blood," says Micah indignantly.[3] Jeremiah cries with still more vehemence to his generation, "Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent poor;"[4] and again, "But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it."[5]

[1] Isa. i. 15. [3] Micah iii. 10. [5] Jer. xxii. 17.
[2] Isa. lix. 7. [4] Jer. ii. 34.

We are to conceive, then, the young and active men of the day constantly tempted to take these unhallowed paths which seemed to promise wealth; the sinners were always ready to whisper in the ears of those whose life was tedious and unattractive,[1] "Cast in thy lot among us; we will all have one purse." The moral sense of the community was not sufficiently developed to heartily condemn this life of iniquity; as in the eighteenth century among ourselves, so in Israel when this book was written, there existed in the minds of the people at large a lurking admiration for the bold and dashing "gentlemen of the way."

The other special temptation of that day is described in our book with remarkable realism, and there is no false shame in exposing the paths of death into which it leads. In v. 3-20 the subject is treated in the plainest way: "Her latter end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on Sheol." It is taken up again in vi. 24-35: "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? or can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?" The guilty man who has been betrayed by the glitter and beauty, by the honeyed words and the soft entreaties, "shall get wounds and dishonour, and his reproach shall not be wiped away."

In chap. vii. 5-27 a most vivid picture is drawn of the foolish youth seduced into evil; there he is seen going as an ox to the slaughter, as one in fetters, "till an arrow strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his

[1] Prov. i. 14. Compare the proverb, xvi. 29, "A man of violence enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him in a way that is not good."

life." And the Introduction closes with a delineation of Folly, which is obviously meant as a counterpart to the delineation of Wisdom in chap. i. 20, etc.[1] The miserable woman sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city; with seductive words she wins the foolish passers-by to enter her doors: "the dead are there; her guests are in the depths of Sheol."

It is a temptation which in many varying forms has always beset human life. No small part of the danger is that this evil, above all others, grows in silence, and yet seems to be aggravated by publicity. The preacher cannot speak plainly about it, and even writers shrink from touching the subject. We can, however, be thankful that the book, which is God's book rather than man's, knows nothing of our false modesty and conventional delicacy: it speaks out not only boldly, but minutely; it is so explicit that no man who with a prayerful heart will meditate upon its teachings need fall into the pitfall—that pitfall which seems to grow even more subtle and more seductive as civilization advances, and as the great cities absorb a larger proportion of the population; or if he fall he can only admit with shame and remorse, "I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. Neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me. I was well-nigh in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly."[2]

In the second place, we must try to look at these temptations in the light of our own day, in order that we may listen to the voice of wisdom, not in the anti-

[1] Prov. ix. 13-18. [2] Prov. v. 12-14.

quarian, but rather in the practical spirit. The second temptation exists amongst us almost unchanged, except that the vast accumulation and concentration of vice in great cities has provided that mournful band of women whom a great moralist has designated the Vestal Virgins of Humanity, consecrated to shame and ruin in order to preserve unsullied the sacred flame of the domestic altar. The result of this terrible development in evil is that the deadly sin has become safer for the sinner, and in certain circles of society has become recognized as at any rate a venial fault, if not an innocent necessity. It is well to read these chapters again with our eye on the modern evil, and to let the voice of Wisdom instruct us that the life is not the less blighted because the body remains unpunished, and vice is not the less vicious because, instead of ruining others for its gratification, it feeds only on those who are already ruined. If the Wisdom of the Old Testament is obscure on this point, the Wisdom of the New Testament gives no uncertain sound. Interpreting the doctrine of our book, as Christians are bound to do, by the light of Christ, we can be left in no doubt that to all forms of impurity applies the one principle which is here applied to a specific form: "He doeth it that would destroy his own soul." "His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin."[1]

But with regard to the first of the two temptations, it may be urged that in our settled and ordered society it is no longer felt. We are not tempted to become highwaymen, nor even to embark on the career of a

[1] Prov. vi. 32 and v. 22.

professional thief. We are disposed to skim lightly over the warning, under the impression that it does not in any way apply to us. But stop a moment! Wisdom spoke in the first instance direct to the vice of her day, but she gave to her precepts a more general colouring, which makes it applicable to all time, when she said, "So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; it taketh away the life of the owners thereof."[1] The specific form of greediness described in this first chapter may have become obsolete among decent and respectable people; but that greed of gain which showed itself then in a particular form is alive to-day. Dressed in a different garb, it presents temptations of a slightly different order; but the spirit is the same, the issue, the fatal issue, is the same. It is a melancholy fact that in the most progressive and civilized communities the greed of gain, instead of dying out, becomes aggravated, acquires a dominant influence, and sways men as the master passion. The United States, a country so bountiful to her children that a settled peace might be supposed to pervade the life of men who can never be in fear of losing the necessaries, or even the comforts, of life, are inflamed with a fierce and fiery passion. Society is one perpetual turmoil; life is lived at the highest conceivable pressure, because each individual is seeking to gain more and ever more. In our own country, though society is less fluid, and ancient custom checks the action of disturbing forces, the passion for gain becomes every year a more exacting tyranny over the lives of the people. We are engaged in a pitiless warfare, which we dignify by the

[1] Prov. i. 19.

name of competition; the race is to the swift, and the battle to the strong. It becomes almost a recognized principle that man is at liberty to prey upon his fellow man. The Eternal Law of Wisdom declares that we should treat others as we treat ourselves, and count the interests of others dear as our own; it teaches us that we should show a tender consideration for the weak, and be always ready, at whatever cost, to succour the helpless. But competition says, "No; you must try rather to beat the weak out of the field; you must leave no device untried to reduce the strength of the strong, and to divert into your own hands the grist which was going to your neighbour's mill." This conflict between man and man is untempered by pity, because it is supposed to be unavoidable as death itself. In a community so constituted, where business has fallen into such ways, while the strong may hold their own with a clean hand, the weaker are tempted to make up by cunning what they lack in strength, and the weakest are ground as the nether millstone. The pitilessness of the whole system is appalling, the more so because it is accepted as necessary.

The Bandit life has here emerged in a new form. "Come, let us lay wait for blood," says the Sweater or the Fogger, "let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them up alive as Sheol, and whole as those that go down into the pit."[1] The Bandit is an outcast from society, and his hand is turned against the rich. The Sweater is an outcast

[1] A dog-chain sold in London at one shilling and threepence was found to have cost, for materials twopence, for labour three-farthings. (Evidence before Lord Dunraven's Commission on the Sweating System).

from society, and his hand is turned against the poor. By "laying wait" he is able to demand, from weak men, women, and children, the long hours of the day for unceasing toil, and the bitter hours of the night for hunger and cold, until the gaunt creatures, worn with weariness and despair, find a solace in debauchery or an unhallowed rest in death.

Now, though the temptation to become a sweater may not affect many or any of us, I should like to ask, Are there not certain trades or occupations, into which some of us are tempted to enter, perfectly honeycombed with questionable practices? Under the pretext that it is all "business," are not things done which can only be described as preying upon the innocence or the stupidity of our neighbours? Sometimes the promise is, "We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil."[1] Sometimes the simple object is to escape starvation. But there is the miserable temptation to sacrifice probity and honour, to stifle compassion and thought, in order to bring into our own coffers the coveted wealth. And is there not, I ask, a similar temptation lurking in a thousand haunts more or less respectable—a temptation which may be described as the spirit of *gambling?* The essence of all gambling, whether it be called speculative business or gaming, in stock and share markets or in betting clubs and turf rings, is simply the attempt to trade on the supposed ignorance or misfortune of others, and to use superior knowledge or fortune for the purpose, not of helping, but of robbing them. It may be said that we do it in self-defence, and that others would do the

[1] See Prov. i. 13.

same by us; yes, just as the bandit says to the young man, "We do not want to injure the traveller yonder; we want his purse. He will try to shoot you; you only shoot him in self-defence." It is the subtlety of all gambling that constitutes its great danger. It seems to turn on the principle that we may do what we like with our own; it forgets that its object is to get hold of what belongs to others, not by honest work or service rendered, but simply by cunning and deception.

It is, then, only too easy to recognize, in many varied shapes of so-called business and of so-called pleasure, "the ways of those who are greedy of gain." Wisdom has need to cry aloud in our streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the city, in exchanges and marts. Her warning to the young man must be explicit and solemn: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." The bandit life still has its attractions, though its methods are changed; it plays upon the idle imagination: it promises freedom from laborious and distasteful toil; but it says nothing of the ways of death into which it leads.

Now, in the third place, we come to the protest of Divine Wisdom against these evil ways in which men are tempted to walk. They are, she says, folly of the most egregious kind. There may be an apparent success or a momentary gratification; "precious substance may be amassed, and houses may be filled with spoil;" but the people who are betrayed into these wicked courses "shall be cut off from the land."[1] They "lay wait for their own blood;" greed "taketh away the life of the owner thereof;"[2] and as for the strange

[1] Prov. ii. 22. [2] Prov. i. 19.

woman, that flattereth with her words, "none that go unto her return again."[1]

It needs but a clear vision or a little wise reflection to see the destructive tendency of Evil. It is the commonest fact of experience that where "vice goes before, vengeance follows after." Why do men not perceive it? There is a kind of fatuity which blinds the eyes. The empty-headed bird sees the net spread out before its eyes;[2] many of its fellows have already been caught; the warning seems obvious enough, but it is all "in vain;" eager to get the bait—the dainty morsel lying there, easily obtainable — the foolish creature approaches, looks, argues that it is swifter and stronger than its predecessors, who were but weaklings! it will wheel down, take the food, and be gone long before the flaps of the net can spring together. In the same way the empty-headed youth, warned by the experience of elders and the tender entreaties of father and mother, assured that these ways of unjust gain are ways of ruin, is yet rash enough to enter the snare in order to secure the coveted morsel. And what is the issue? Setting at nought all the counsel of Wisdom, he would none of her reproof.[3] A momentary success led to wilder infatuation, and convinced him that he was right, and Wisdom was wrong; but his prosperity destroyed him. Soon in the shame of exposure and the misery of remorse he discovers his mistake. Or, worse still, no exposure comes; success continues to his dying day, and he leaves his substance to his heirs; "he eats of the fruits of his own way, and is filled with his own devices,"[4] but none the less he

[1] Prov. ii. 19.
[2] Prov. i. 17.
[3] Prov. i. 25.
[4] Prov. i. 31, 32.

walks in the ways of darkness—in paths that are crooked and perverse—and he is consumed with inward misery. The soul within is hard, and dry, and dead; it is insensible to all feelings except feelings of torture. It is a life so dark and wretched, that when a sudden light is thrown upon its hidden secrets men are filled with astonishment and dismay, that such things could exist underneath that quiet surface.

Finally, note these two characteristics of the Divine Wisdom: (1) she is found in her fulness only by diligent seekers; and (2) rejected, she turns into the most scornful and implacable foe.

She is to be sought as silver or hidden treasure is sought. The search must be inspired by that eagerness of desire and passion of resolve with which avarice seeks for money. No faculty must be left unemployed: the *ear* is to be inclined to catch the first low sounds of wisdom; the *heart* is to be applied to understand what is heard; the very *voice* is to be lifted up in earnest inquiry. It is a well-known fact that the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God are not fruits which grow on every wayside bush, to be plucked by every idle passer-by, to be dropped carelessly and trodden under foot. Without seriousness and devotion, without protracted and unflagging toil, the things of God are not to be attained. You must be up betimes; you must be on your knees early; you must lay open the book of Wisdom, pore over its pages, and diligently turn its leaves, meditating on its sayings day and night. The kingdom of God and His righteousness must be *sought*, yes, and sought first, sought exclusively, as the one important object of desire. That easy indifference, that lazy optimism—"it will all come right in the end"

—that habit of delay in deciding, that inclination to postpone the eternal realities to vanishing shadows, will be your ruin. The time may come when you will call, and there will be no answer, when you will seek diligently, but shall not find. Then in the day of your calamity, when your fear cometh, what a smile of scorn will seem to be on Wisdom's placid brow, and around her eloquent lips! what derision will seem to ring in the well-remembered counsels which you rejected.[1] O tide in the affairs of men! O tide in the affairs of God! We are called to stand by death-beds, to look into anguished eyes which know that it is too late. The bandit of commercial life passes into that penal servitude which only death will end; what agony breaks out and hisses in his remorse! The wretched victim of lust passes from the house of his sin down the path which inclines unto death; how terrible is that visage which just retains smirched traces that purity once was there! The voice rings down the doleful road, "If I had only been wise, if I had given ear, wisdom might have entered even into my heart, knowledge might have been pleasant even to my soul!"

And wisdom still cries to *us*, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."

[1] Prov. i. 24-31.

III.

THE EARTHLY REWARDS OF WISDOM.

PROV. iii. 1-10.

THE general teaching of these nine introductory chapters is that the "ways of Wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." We are taught to look for the fruit of righteousness in long life and prosperity, for the penalty of sin in premature destruction. "The upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the land, and they that deal treacherously shall be rooted out of it."[1] The foolish "shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto Wisdom shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil."[2] "By Wisdom thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shall bear it." The ways of Folly have this legend written over the entrance-gate: "The dead are there; her guests are in the depths of Sheol."[3]

This teaching is summarized in the passage before

[1] Prov. ii. 21, 22. [2] Prov. i. 31-33. [3] Prov. ix. 12, 18.

us. "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and years of life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth," those primary requirements of wisdom, "forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thy heart;" *i.e.* let them be an ornament which strikes the eye of the beholder, but also an inward law which regulates the secret thought. "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man;" that is to say, the charm of thy character will conciliate the love of thy fellow creatures and of thy God, while they recognize, and He approves, the spiritual state from which these graces grow. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding:[1] in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil: it shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thy increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine."[2]

The rewards of wisdom, then, are health and long life, the good-will of God and man, prosperity, and abundant earthly possessions. As our Lord would put it, they who leave house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, shall receive manifold more in this time, even of the things which they surrender, in addition to the everlasting life in the time to come.[3]

[1] *Cf.* xxviii. 26, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."

[2] Prov. iii. 1-10.

[3] Luke xviii. 29, 30.

This is a side of truth which we frequently allow to drop out of sight, in order to emphasize another side which is considered more important. We are accustomed to dwell on the promised joys of the future world as if godliness had no promise of the life which now is, and in so doing we take all life and colour from those expected blessings. The true view seems to be, The way of wisdom, the path of the upright, is so full of joy, so crowned with peace; the life of the children of the kingdom is so wisely and bountifully provided for; the inevitable pains and troubles which fall to their share are so transformed; that from this present good we can infer a future better, gathering hints and promises of what we shall be from the realized felicity of what we are.

If we try to estimate the temporal blessings of wisdom we do not thereby deny the larger and more lasting blessings which are to come; while if we ignore these present joyful results we deprive ourselves of the surest evidence for the things which, though hoped for, are not yet seen.

We may, then, with much advantage try to estimate some of the immediate and apprehensible benefits of the life which is lived according to the dictates of heavenly wisdom.

(1) First of all, the right life is a wholesome life—yes, physically healthy. Obedience to the eternal moral laws brings "health to the navel," and that peculiar brightness which is like the freshness of dew.[1] The body is a sacred trust, a temple of the Holy

[1] The Hebrew word שִׁקּוּי in iii. 8*b* is the same as that which is translated "my drink" in Hosea ii. 6. The LXX. render it "marrow," but it means the moisture which in a natural and healthy state keeps

Ghost; to use it ill is to violate the trust and to defile the temple. The temperance of habit and orderliness of life which Wisdom requires of her children are the first conditions of vitality. They who seek health as the first consideration become valetudinarians and find neither health nor happiness; but they who diligently follow the law of God and the impulse of His Spirit find that health has come to them, as it were, by a side wind. The peace of mind, the cheerfulness of temper, the transfer of all anxiety from the human spirit to the strong Spirit of God, are very favourable to longevity. Insurance societies have made this discovery, and actuaries will tell you that in a very literal way the children of God possess the earth, while the wicked are cut off.

Yet no one thinks of measuring life only by days and years. To live long with the constant feeling that life is not worth living, or to live long with the constant apprehension of death, must be counted as a small and empty life. Now, it is the chief blessedness in the lot of the children of light that each day is a full, rich day, unmarred by recollections, unshadowed by apprehensions. Each day is distinctly worth living; it has its own exquisite lessons of cloud or sunshine, its own beautiful revelations of love, and pity, and hope. Time does not hang heavily on the hands, nor yet is its hurried flight a cause of vain regret; for it has accomplished that for which it was sent, and by staying longer could not accomplish more. And if, after all, God has appointed but a few years for His child's earthly life, that is not to be regretted; the only ground for sorrow would

the bones supple, as opposed to the dryness which is produced by senility or disease.

be to live longer than His wise love had decreed. "If God thy death desires," as St. Genest says to Adrien in Rotrou's tragedy, "life has been long enow."[1]

The life in God is undoubtedly a healthy life, nor is it the less healthy because the outward man has to decay, and mortality has to be swallowed up of life. From the standpoint of the Proverbs this wider application of the truth was not as yet visible. The problem which emerges in the book of Job was not yet solved. But already, as I think we shall see, it was understood that the actual and tangible rewards of righteousness were of incomparable price, and made the prosperity of the wicked look poor and delusive.

(2) But there is a second result of the right life which ordinary observation and common sense may estimate. Wisdom is very uncompromising in her requirement of fair dealing between man and man. She cannot away with those commercial practices which can only be described as devising "evil against thy neighbour," who "dwelleth securely by thee."[2] Her main economic principle is this, that all legitimate trade is the mutual advantage of buyer and seller; where the seller is seeking to dupe the buyer, and the buyer is seeking to rob the seller, trade ceases, and the transaction is the mere inworking of the devil. Wisdom is quite aware that by these ways of the devil wealth may be accumulated; she is not blind to the fact that the overreaching spirit of greed has its rich and splendid reward; but she maintains none the less that "the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but He blesseth the habitation of the righteous."[3]

[1] *Si ton Dieu veut ta mort, c'est déjà trop vécu.*

[2] Prov. iii. 29. [3] Prov. iii. 33.

It is a very impressive experience to enter the house of a great magnate whose wealth has been obtained by questionable means. The rooms are beautiful; works by the great masters shed their radiance of eternal truth from the walls; the library gleams with the well-bound books of moralists and religious teachers. The sons and daughters of the house are fair and elegant; the smile of prosperity is in every curtained and carpeted room, and seems to beam out of every illuminated window; and yet the sensitive spirit cannot be rid of the idea that "the curse of the Lord is in the house."

On the other hand, the honourable man whose paths have been directed by the Lord, no matter whether he be wealthy or merely in receipt, as the result of a life's labour, of his "daily bread," has a blessing in his house. Men trust him and honour him.[1] His wealth flows as a fertilizing stream, or if it run dry, his friends, who love him for himself, make him feel that it was a good thing to lose it in order to find them. In proportion as the fierce struggle of competition has made the path of fair dealing more difficult, they who walk in it are the more honoured and loved. Nowhere does Wisdom smile more graciously or open her hand to bless more abundantly, than in the later years of a life which has in its earlier days been exposed, and has offered a successful resistance, to the strong temptations of unrighteous gain.

(3) Further, Wisdom commands not only justice, but generosity. She requires her children to yield the first-fruits of all their possessions to the Lord, and to

[1] *Cf.* xii. 8, "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised."

look tenderly upon His poor. "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee."[1] And the teaching of experience is that those who act upon this precept purchase to themselves a good possession. The main value of the Mammon of unrighteousness is, as our Lord says, to make to ourselves friends with it, friends who shall receive us into the everlasting habitations. The money we spend upon our own pleasures, and to promote our own interests, is spent and gone; but the money given with an open hand to those poor children of God, to whom it is strictly due, is not spent at all, but laid up in the most secure of banks. There is no source of joy in this present world to be compared with the loving gratitude of the poor whom you have lovingly helped. Strangely enough, men will spend much to obtain a title which carries no honour with it, forgetting that the same money given to the needy and the suffering purchases the true honour, which gives the noblest title. For we are none of us so stupid as to think that the empty admiration of the crowd is so rich in blessing as the heartfelt love of the few.

But in enumerating these external results of right living we have only touched incidentally upon the deeper truths which lie at the root of it. It is time to look at these.

God is necessarily so much to men, men are necessarily so completely bereft without Him, that clear vision and strong action are utterly impossible apart from a humble dependence upon Him. The beginning

[1] Prov. iii. 27, 28.

of all wisdom is, as we have seen, in the recognition of God, in personal submission to Him, in diligent obedience to all His directions. This appears, before we reflect, to be a mere truism; when we have reflected, it proves to be a great revelation. We do not at first see what is meant by trusting in the Lord with all our heart; we confuse it with that tepid, conventional relation to God which too frequently passes current for faith. We do not readily apprehend what is implied in acknowledging God in all our ways; we suppose that it only means a general professing and calling ourselves Christians. Consequently, many of us who believe that we trust in the Lord, yet lean habitually and confidently upon our own understanding, and are even proud of doing so; we are wise in our own eyes long after our folly has become apparent to every one else; we resent with a vehemence of righteous indignation any imputation upon the soundness of our judgment. The very tone of mock humility in which we say, "I may be wrong, but——" shows that we are putting a case which seems to us practically impossible. Consequently, while we think that we are acknowledging God in all our ways, He does not direct our paths; indeed, we never gave Him an opportunity. From first to last we directed them ourselves. Let us frankly acknowledge that we do not really believe in God's detailed concern with the affairs of the individual life; that we do not, therefore, commit our way with an absolute surrender into His hand; that we do not think of submitting to His disposal the choice of our profession, the choice of our partner in life, the choice of our place of residence, the choice of our style of living, the choice of our field of public service, the choice of our

scale of giving. Let us confess that we settled all these things in implicit and unquestioning reliance upon our own understanding.

I speak only in wide and fully admitted generalities. If Christians as a whole had really submitted their lives in every detail to God, do you suppose that there would be something like fifty thousand Christian ministers and ten times that number of Christian workers at home, while scarcely a twentieth of that number have gone out from us to labour abroad? If Christians had really submitted their lives to God, would there have been these innumerable wretched marriages—man and wife joined together by no spiritual tie, but by the caprice of fancy or the exigencies of social caste? If Christians had really asked God to guide them, meaning what they said, would all the rich be found in districts together, while all the poor are left to perish in other districts apart? If Christians had really accepted God's direction, would they be living in princely luxury while the heathen world is crying for the bread of life? would they be spending their strength on personal aims while the guidance of social and political affairs is left in the hands of the self-interested? would they be giving such a fragment of their wealth to the direct service of the Kingdom of God?

We may answer very confidently that the life actually being lived by the majority of Christian people is not the result of God directing their paths, but simply comes from leaning on their own understanding. And what a sorrowful result!

But in face of this apostasy of life and practice, we can still joyfully point to the fact that they who do entirely renounce their own judgment, who are small

in their own eyes, and who, with their whole heart trusting Him, acknowledge Him in all their ways, find their lives running over with blessing, and become the means of incalculable good to the world and to themselves. It would not be easy to make plain or even credible, to those who have never trusted in God, how this guidance and direction are given. Not by miraculous signs or visible interpositions, not by voices speaking from heaven, nor even by messages from human lips, but by ways no less distinct and infinitely more authoritative, God guides men with His eye upon them, tells them, "This is the way; walk ye in it," and whispers to them quite intelligibly when they turn to the right hand or the left. With a noble universality of language, this text says nothing of Urim or Thummim, of oracle or seer, of prophet or book: "He shall direct thy paths."[1] That is enough; the method is left open to the wisdom and love of Him who directs. There is something even misleading in saying much about the methods; to set limits to God's revelations, as Gideon did, is unworthy of the faith which has become aware of God as the actual and living Reality, compared with whom all other realities are but shadows. Our Lord did not follow the guidance of His Father by a mechanical method of signs, but by a more intimate and immediate perception of His will. When Jesus promised us the Spirit as an indwelling and abiding presence He clearly intimated that the Christian life should be maintained by the direct action of God upon the several faculties of the mind, stimulating the memory, quickening the perception of truth, as well as working on the conscience and opening the channels of prayer. When

[1] Prov. iii. 6.

we wait for signs we show a defect of faith. True trust in our Heavenly Father rests in the absolute assurance that He will make the path plain, and leave us in no uncertainty about His will. To doubt that He speaks inwardly and controls us, even when we are unconscious of His control, is to doubt Him altogether.

When a few years have been passed in humble dependence on God, it is then possible to look back and see with astonishing clearness how real and decisive the leadings of the Spirit have been. There were moments when two alternatives were present, and we were tempted to decide on the strength of our own understanding; but thanks be to His name, we committed it to Him. We stepped forward then in the darkness; we deserted the way which seemed most attractive, and entered the narrow path which was shrouded in mist. We knew He was leading us, but we could not see. Now we see, and we cannot speak our praise. Our life, we find, is all a plan of God, and He conceals it from us, as if on purpose to evoke our trust, and to secure that close and personal communion which the uncertainty renders necessary.

Are you suspicious of the Inward Light, as it is called? Does it seem to open up endless possibilities of self-delusion? Are you disgusted with those who follow their own wilful way, and seek a sanction for it by calling it the leading of God? You will find that the error has arisen from not trusting the Lord "with the whole heart," or from not acknowledging Him "in all ways." The eye has not been single, and the darkness therefore has been, as our Lord declares that it would be, dense.[1] The remedy is not to be found

[1] Matt. vi.

in leaning more on our own understanding, but rather in leaning less. Wisdom calls for a certain absoluteness in all our relations to God, a fearless, unreserved, and constantly renewed submission of heart to Him. Wisdom teaches that in His will is our peace, and that His will is learnt by practical surrender to His ways and commandments.

Now, is it not obvious that while the external results of wisdom are great and marked, this inward result, which is the spring of them all, is more blessed than any? The laws which govern the universe are the laws of God. The Stoic philosophy demanded a life according to Nature. That is not enough, for by Nature is meant God's will for the inanimate or non-moral creation. Where there is freedom of the will, existence must not be "according to Nature," but according to God; that is to say, life must be lived in obedience to God's laws for human life. The inorganic world moves in ordered response to God's will. We, as men, have to choose; we have to discover; we have to interpret. Woe to us if we choose amiss, for then we are undone. Woe to us if we do not understand, but in a brutish way follow the ordinances of death instead of the way of life!

Now, the supreme bliss of the heavenly wisdom is that it leads us into this detailed obedience to the law which is our life; it sets us under the immediate and unbroken control of God. Well may it be said, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies."[1] And yet

[1] Prov. iii. 13-15.

rubies are very precious. I learn that the valley in Burmah where the most perfect rubies in the world are found is situated four thousand five hundred feet above the sea level, in a range of mountainous spurs about eighty miles due north of Mandalay; but owing to the difficult nature of the intervening ground, the valley can only be reached by a circuitous journey of some two hundred miles, which winds through malarious jungles and over arduous mountain passes. An eminent jewellers' firm is about to explore the Valley of Rubies, though it is quite uncertain whether the stones may not be exhausted. Wisdom is "more precious than *rubies*, and none of the things thou canst desire are to be compared unto her."

To know the secret of the Lord, to walk in this world not guideless, but led by the Lord of life, to approach death itself not fearful, but in the hands of that Infinite Love for whom death does not exist, surely this is worth more than the gold and precious stones which belong only to the earth and are earthy. This wisdom is laden with riches which cannot be computed in earthly treasures; "she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her."[1] The creation itself, in its vast and infinite perfections, with all its æonian changes, and all the mysterious ministries which order its details and maintain its activities, comes from that same wisdom which controls the right human life. The man, therefore, who is led in the ways of wisdom, trusting wholly to God, is in harmony with that great universe of which he forms an intelligent part: he may lie down without being afraid; he may walk securely

[1] Prov. iii. 18.

without stumbling; no sudden fear can assail him; all the creatures of God are his sisters and his brothers; even Sister Death, as St. Francis used to say, is a familiar and a friend to him.

We have been dwelling upon the outward results of Heavenly Wisdom—the health, the prosperity, the friends, the favour with God and man which come to those who possess her. We have been led to seek out the secret of her peace in the humble surrender of the will to its rightful Lord. But there is a caution needed, a truth which has already occurred to the author of this chapter. It is evident that while Wisdom brings in her hand riches and honour,[1] health to the navel, and marrow to the bones,[2] it will not be enough to judge only by appearances. As we have pondered upon the law of Wisdom, we have become aware that there may be an apparent health and prosperity, a bevy of friends, and a loud-sounding fame which are the gift not of Wisdom, but of some other power. It will not do, therefore, to set these outward things before our eyes as the object of desire; it will not do to envy the possessors of them.[3] "The secret of the Lord is with the upright," and it may often be that they to whom His secret has become open will choose the frowns of adversity rather than the smile of prosperity, will choose poverty rather than wealth, will welcome solitude and contumely down in the Valley of Humiliation. For it is an open secret, in the sweet light of wisdom it becomes a self-evident truth, that "whom the Lord loveth He reproveth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."[4]

[1] Prov. iii. 16.
[2] Prov. iii. 8.
[3] Prov. iii. 31.
[4] Prov. iii. 12.

There is, then, a certain paradox in the life of wisdom which no ingenuity can avoid. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, but we may not seek them because they are pleasant, for other ways are pleasant too, or seem to be so for a while. All her paths are peace, but we do not enter them to gain peace, for the peace comes often under the stress of a great conflict or in the endurance of a heavy chastening. A thousand temporal blessings accompany the entrance into the narrow way, but so far from seeking them, it is well-nigh impossible to start on the way unless we lose sight and care of them altogether. The Divine Wisdom gives us these blessings when we no longer set our hearts on them, because while we set our hearts on them they are dangerous to us. Putting the truth in the clearest light which has been given to us, the light of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are called upon to give up everything in order to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and when we are absorbed in that as our true object of search everything is given back to us a hundredfold; we are called upon to take up our cross and follow Him, and when we do so He bears the cross for us; we are called upon to take His yoke upon us and to learn of Him, and immediately we take it—not before—we find that it is easy. The wise, loving only wisdom, find that they have inherited glory; the fools, seeking only promotion, find that they have achieved nothing but shame.[1]

[1] Prov. iii. 35.

IV.

EDUCATION: THE CHILD'S THOUGHT OF THE PARENT.

"Wisdom doth live with children round her knees."
WORDSWORTH.

"He taught me, and said unto me," etc.—PROV. iv. 4.

THIS chapter begins with a charming little piece of autobiography. Unhappily the writer is unknown. That it was not Solomon is plain from the fact that an only son is speaking, and we know from 1 Chron. iii. 5 that Solomon was not an only son of his mother.[2] But the naïveté and beauty of the confession are the same, whoever was the speaker. The grateful memories of a father's teaching and of a mother's tenderness give point and force to the exhortations. "Do I urge upon you, young people, the claims of Wisdom?" the author seems to say. "Well I speak from experience. My parents taught me her wholesome and pleasant ways. Though I was an only son, they did not by a selfish indulgence allow me to be spoiled. They made me bear the yoke in my youth, and now I live to thank them for it."

There is a great temptation to spoil an only child, a

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[1] This subject, which occupies so large a part of the book, is further treated in Lect. XXIII.

[2] It is noteworthy that the LXX. in ver. 2 seek to maintain the Solomonic authorship by deliberately altering the words.

temptation which few are able to resist. Parents can deny themselves everything for their idol, except the pleasure of making the child a despot; they can endure any pain for their despot, except the pain of resisting him and instructing him. And accordingly they have sometimes to experience the shame and anguish of their children's curses, like that Carthaginian mother, of whom it is related that her son, a convicted criminal, passing to execution, requested that he might whisper something to her, and, coming near, bit off her ear, saying that it was his revenge because she had brought him up so badly. Very different are the feelings of our author; he owes much to his parents, and is eager to acknowledge what he owes. God has no kinder gift to give us than a hallowed home, the memory of lessons from the lips of father and mother, the early impressions of virtue and wisdom, the sacred streams which rise from that fountainhead, and that alone, and run freshening and singing and broadening all through our lives.[1]

With this happy example of good home influence before our eyes, we will come to consider briefly two points which are suggested by it: *first*, the importance of these early impressions; *second*, the main features of the discipline presented in the chapter.

I. Not without reason has a great cardinal of the Roman Church said that if he may have the children up to the age of five, he will not mind in whose hand they may be afterwards; for it is almost impossible to exaggerate the permanent effects of those first tendencies impressed on the soul before the intellect is developed,

[1] *Cf.* the beautiful family picture of the linked and mutually blessed generations in the proverb, "Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers" (xvii. 6).

and while the soft, plastic nature of the child is not yet determined in any particular direction. Things which we learn we can more or less unlearn, but things which are blended with the elements of our composition, made parts of us before we are conscious of our own personality, defy the hand of time and the power of conscious effort to eradicate them.

John Paton, that noble missionary to the New Hebrides, has given us a vivid picture of his early home. It was a plain lowland cottage, with its "but and ben," and between the two a small chamber with a diminutive window shedding diminutive light on the scene. To this room the children saw the father retire oftentimes a day, and shut to the door; they would occasionally hear the pathetic pleadings of the voice that prayed, and they learnt to slip past the door on tiptoe. They got to understand whence came that happy light upon their father's face; they recognized it as a reflection from the Divine presence, in the consciousness of which he lived.

Let a child draw his first breath in a house which possesses a sanctuary like that; let him come to know by his quick childish perceptions that there is in his home a ladder set up from earth to heaven, and that the angels of God go up and down on it; let him feel the Divine atmosphere in his face, the air all suffused with heavenly light, the sweetness and the calm which prevail in a place where a constant communion is maintained,—and in after years he will be aware of voices which call and hands which reach out to him from his childhood, connecting him with heaven, and even the most convincing negations of unbelief will be powerless to shake the faith which is deep as the springs of his life.

We learn to love, not because we are taught to love, but by some contagious influence of example or by some indescribable attraction of beauty. Our first love to Wisdom, or, to use our modern phrase, Religion, is won from us by living with those that love her. She stole in upon us and captured us without any overpowering arguments; she was beautiful and we felt that those whom we loved were constantly taken and held by her beauty. Just reflect upon this subtle and wonderful truth. If my infancy is spent among those whose main thought is "to get" riches, I acquire imperceptibly the love of money. I cannot rationally explain my love; but it seems to me in after life a truism, that money is the principal thing; I look with blank incredulity upon one who questions this ingrained truth. But if in infancy I live with those whose love is wholly centred upon Religion, who cherish her with unaffected ardour and respond to her claims with kindling emotion, I may in after life be seduced from her holy ways for awhile, but I am always haunted by the feeling that I have left my first love, I am restless and uneasy until I can win back that "old bride-look of earlier days."

Yes, that old bride-look—for religion may be so presented to the child's heart as to appear for ever the bride elect of the soul, from whose queenly love promotion may be expected, whose sweet embraces bring a dower of honour, whose beautiful fingers twine a chaplet of grace for the head and set a crown of glory on the brow.[1]

The affections are elicited, and often permanently

[1] Prov. iv. 8, 9.

fixed, before the understanding has come into play. If the child's heart is surrendered to God, and moulded by heavenly wisdom, the man will walk securely; a certain trend will be given to all his thoughts; a certain instinctive desire for righteousness will be engrafted in his nature; and an instinctive aversion will lead him to decline the way of the wicked.[1]

The first thing, then, is to give our children an atmosphere to grow up in; to cultivate their affections, and set their hearts on the things eternal; to make them associate the ideas of wealth and honour, of beauty and glory, not with material possessions, but with the treasures and rewards of Wisdom.

II. But now comes the question, What is to be the definite teaching of the child? for it is an unfailing mark of the parents who themselves are holy that they are impelled to give clear and memorable instruction to their children. And this is where the great and constant difficulty emerges. If the hallowed example would suffice we might count the task comparatively easy. But some day the understanding will begin to assert itself; the desire to question, to criticise, to prove, will awake. And then, unless the truths of the heart have been applied to the conscience in such a way as to satisfy the reason, there may come the desolate time in which, while the habits of practical life remain pure, and the unconscious influence of early training continues to be effective, the mind is shaken by doubt, and the hope of the soul is shrouded in a murky cloud.

Now the answer to this question may for the Chris-

[1] Prov. iv. 14.

tian be briefly given, Bring your children to Christ, teach them to recognize in Him their Saviour, and to accept Him as their present Lord and gracious Friend. But this all-inclusive answer will not suffer by a little expansion on the lines which are laid down in the chapter before us. When Christ is made unto us Wisdom, the contents of Wisdom are not altered, they are only brought within our reach and made effectual in us. Bringing our children to Christ will not merely consist in teaching them the doctrine of salvation, but it will include showing them in detail what salvation is, and the method of its realization.

The first object in the home life is to enable children to realize what salvation is. It is easy to dilate on an external heaven and hell, but it is not so easy to demonstrate that salvation is an inward state, resulting from a spiritual change.

It is very strange that Judaism should ever have sunk into a formal religion of outward observance, when its own Wisdom was so explicit on this point: "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them *in the midst of thine heart.* For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. *Keep thy heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."[1] The Greek version, which was very generally used in our Lord's time, had a beautiful variation of this last clause: "In order that thy fountains may not fail thee, guard them in the heart." It was after all but a new emphasis on the old teaching of the book of Proverbs when Jesus taught the necessity

[1] Prov. iv. 20-23.

of heart purity, and when He showed that out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, and all the things which defile a man.[1] Yet this lesson of inwardness has always been the most difficult of all to learn. Christianity itself has always been declining from it and falling into the easier but futile ways of externalism; and even Christian homes have usually failed in their influence on the young chiefly because their religious observances have fallen into formalism, and while the outward conduct has been regulated, the inner springs of action have not been touched.

All conduct is the outcome of hidden fountains. All words are the expression of thoughts. The first thing and the main thing is that the hidden fountains of thought and feeling be pure. The source of all our trouble is the bitterness of heart, the envious feeling, the sudden outbreak of corrupt desire. A merely outward salvation would be of no avail; a change of place, a magic formula, a conventional pardon, could not touch the root of the mischief. "I wish you would change my heart," said the chief Sekomi to Livingstone, "Give me medicine to change it, for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always." He would not hear of the New Testament way of changing the heart; he wanted an outward, mechanical way—and that way was not to be found. The child at first thinks in the same way. Heaven is a place to go to, not a state to be in. Hell is an outward punishment to fly from, not an inward condition of the soul. The child has to learn that searching truth which Milton tried to teach, when he described Satan in Paradise,—

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[1] Matt. xv. 19.

". . . within him hell
He brings, and round about him, nor from hell
One step, no more than from himself, can fly
By change of place.

. . . . . .

"'Which way I fly is hell,'

cries the miserable being,

'myself am hell;
And in the lowest deep, a lower deep,
Still threatening to devour me, opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.'"[1]

We are tempted in dealing with children to train them only in outward habits, and to forget the inward sources which are always gathering and forming; hence we often teach them to avoid the lie on the tongue, to put away from them the froward mouth and perverse lips,[2] and yet leave them with the lies in the soul, the deep inward unveracities which are their ruin. We often succeed in bringing them up as respectable and decorous members of society, and yet leave them a prey to secret sins; they are tormented by covetousness which is idolatry, by impurity, and by all kinds of envious and malignant passions.

There is something even ghastly in the very virtues which are sometimes displayed in a highly civilised society like ours. We perceive what appear to be virtues, but we are haunted by an uncomfortable

[1] *Paradise Lost*, iv. 20, etc., and 75. *Cf.* also ix. 120:—

"And the more I see
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
Torment within me, as from hateful siege
Of contraries. All good to me becomes
Bane, and in heaven much worse would be my state."

[2] Prov. iv. 24.

misgiving that they are virtues only in appearance; they seem to have no connection with the heart; they never seem to bubble up from irrepressible fountains; they do not overflow. There is charity, but it is the charity only of the subscription list; there is pity, but it is the pity only of conventional humanitarianism; there is the cold correctness of conduct, or the formal accuracy of speech, but the purity seems to be prudery because it is only a concession to the conventional sentiments of the hour, and the truthfulness seems to be a lie because its very exactness seems to come, not from springs of truth, but only from an artificial habit.

We are frequently bound to notice a religion of a similar kind. It is purely mimetic. It is explained on the same principle as the assimilation of the colours of animals to the colours of their environment. It is the unconscious and hypocritical instinct of self-preservation in a presumably religious society, where not to seem religious would involve a loss of caste. It may be regarded then as the first essential lesson which is to be impressed on the mind of a child,—the lesson coming next after the unconscious influences of example, and before all dogmatic religious teaching,—that righteousness is the condition of salvation, righteousness of the heart; that the outward seeming goes for nothing at all, but that God with a clear and quiet eye gazes down into the hidden depths, and considers whether the fountains there are pure and perennial.

The second thing to be explained and enforced is *singleness of heart*, directness and consistency of aim; by which alone the inward life can be shaped to virtuous ends: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Make level the

path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left."[1] As our Lord puts it, If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. This precept has frequently been given in the interests of worldly wisdom. The boy is told that if he means to get on he must concentrate his thoughts and refuse to let any of the seductions around him divert his attention. Singleness of eye may be the most ruinous of evils—if a man has only a single eye to his own advantage, and pursues nothing but his own pleasure. The precept is given here however in the interests of heavenly wisdom, and there is much to be said for the view that only the truly religious mind can be quite single-eyed. Selfishness, though it seems to be an undivided aim, is really a manifold of tumultuous and conflicting passions. He only, strictly speaking, has one desire, whose one desire is God. The way of wisdom is after all the only way which has no bifurcations. The man who has a single eye to his own interest may find before long that he has missed the way: he pushes eagerly on, but he flounders ever deeper in the mire; for though he did not turn to the right hand nor to the left, he never all the time removed his foot from evil.[2]

The right life then is a steady progress undiverted by the alluring sights and sounds which appeal to the senses.[3] "Look not round about thee," says Ecclesiasticus,[4] "in the streets of the city, neither

[1] Prov. iv. 25-27.

[2] Prov. iv. 27.

[3] *Cf.* xvii. 24, "Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."

[4] Eccles. ix. 7.

wander thou in the solitary places thereof." We are to learn that the way goes through Vanity Fair, but admits of no divergences into its tempting booths or down its alluring alleys; the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, the vainglory of life, are not to distract the mind which has but one purpose in view. The path is to be kept level;[1] as we should say, an even tenor is to be preserved; we are to follow the plain unexciting path of duty, the beaten track of sober rightness. For while it is the mark of all unhallowed ways that they plunge up and down from despondency to wild elation, from giddy raptures to heartstricken depression, it is the sure sign of God's hand in our life when the paths are made level.[2] Ah those tempting ways, on which shine the false lights of imagined duty, of refined selfishness, or of gilded sensuality. Surely it is the result of Wisdom, the gift of God's grace, to keep the eyes "looking right on."

But it is time to sum up. Here is a great contrast between those whose early training has been vicious or neglected, and those who have been "taught in the way of wisdom, led in paths of uprightness." It is a contrast which should constantly be present to the eyes of parents with a warning and an encouragement. The unfortunate child whose infancy was passed in the midst of baleful example, whose heart received no instruction from parents' lips, grows up like one stumbling in the dark, and the darkness deepens as he advances; observers cannot tell—he himself cannot tell—what it is at which he stumbles.[3] There is the old ingrained vice which comes out again and again after every

[1] Prov. iv. 26. [2] Prov. v. 21. [3] Prov. iv. 19.

attempted reformation; there is the old shuffling habit; there is the old unhallowed set of the thoughts and the tastes; there is the old incurable pharisaism, with its tendency to shift all blame on to other people's shoulders. It is all like the damp in the walls of an ill-built house. In dry weather there are only the stains, but those stains are the prophecy of what will be again when the wet weather returns. The corrupt ways have become a second nature; they are as sleep and food to the wretched creature; to abstain from iniquity creates the restlessness of insomnia; if he has not been spreading an influence of evil and leading others astray, he feels as if he had been deprived of his daily food, and he is consumed with a fiery thirst.[1] Even when such an one is genuinely born again, the old hideous habits will appear like seams in the character; and temptations will send the flush along the tell-tale scars.

On the other hand, the life which starts from the sweet examples of a hallowed home, and all its timely chastisements and discipline, presents a most entrancing history. At first there is much which is difficult to bear, much against which the flesh revolts. The influences of purity are cold like the early dawn, and the young child's spirit shrinks and shivers; but with every step along the levelled road the light broadens and the air becomes warmer,—the dawn shines more and more unto the perfect day.[2] As the character forms, as the habits become fixed, as the power of resistance increases, a settled strength and a lasting peace gladden the life. The rays of heavenly wisdom

[1] Prov. iv. 16, 17. [2] Prov. iv. 18, margin.

not only shine on the face, but suffuse the very texture of the being, so that the whole body is full of light. Eventually it begins to appear that truth and purity, pity and charity, have become instinctive. Like a well-disciplined army, they spring at once into the ranks, and are ready for service even on a surprise. The graces of holy living come welling up from those untainted inner springs, and, be the surroundings ever so dry, the fountains fail not. The habit of single-eyed devotion to right avails even where there is no time for reflection; more and more the seductions of the senses lose their point of attack in this disciplined spirit. There is a freedom in the gait, for holiness has ceased to be a toilsome calculation,—the steps of the spiritual man are not straitened. There is a swiftness in all action,—the feet are shod with a joyous and confident preparation, for the fear of stumbling is gone.[1]

With daily growing gratitude and veneration does such an one look back upon the early home of piety and tenderness.

[1] Prov. iv. 12.

V.

THE WAYS AND ISSUES OF SIN.

"His own iniquities shall take the wicked,
And he shall be holden with the cords of his sin.
He shall die for lack of instruction;
And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray."
—PROV. v. 22, 23.

IT is the task of Wisdom, or, as we should say, of the Christian teacher,—and a most distasteful task it is,—to lay bare with an unsparing hand (1) the fascinations of sin, and (2) the deadly entanglements in which the sinner involves himself,—"there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."[1] It would be pleasanter, no doubt, to avoid the subject, or at least to be content with a general caution and a general denunciation; one is tempted to take refuge in the opinion that to mention evils of a certain kind with any particularity is likely to suggest rather than to suppress, to aggravate rather than to lessen, them. But Wisdom is not afraid of plain speaking; she sees that shame is the first result of the Fall, and behind the modest veil of shame the devil works bravely. There is a frankness and a fulness in the delineations of this chapter and of chapter

[1] Prov. xiv. 12.

seven which modern taste would condemn; but the motive cannot be mistaken. Holiness describes the ways of sin in detail to create a horror and a hatred of them; she describes exactly what is within the tempting doors,—all the glamour, all the softness, all the luxury, all the unhallowed raptures,—and shows distinctly how these chambers are on the incline of death, in order that curiosity, the mother of prurience, may be stifled, and the unwary may be content to remove his way far from the temptress, and to come not nigh the door of her house.[1]

But this, it may be said, is the plea urged by a certain school of modern Realism in Art. Let us depict—such is the argument—in all its hideous literalness the sinful life, and leave it to work its own impressions, and to act as a warning to those who are entering on the seductive but dangerous ways. From this principle—so it may be said—has sprung the school of writers at whose head is M. Zola. Yes, but to counteract vice by depicting it is so hazardous a venture that none can do it successfully who is not fortified in virtue himself, and constantly led, directed, and restrained by the Holy Spirit of God. Just in this point lies the great difference between the realism of the Bible and the realism of the French novel. In the first the didactic purpose is at once declared, and the writer moves with swift precision through the fascinating scene, to lift the curtain and show death beyond; in the last the motive is left doubtful, and the writer moves slowly, observantly, even gloatingly, through the abomination and the filth, without any

[1] Prov. v. 8.

clear conception of the Divine Eye which watches, or of the Divine Voice which condemns.[1]

There is a corresponding difference in the effects of the two. Few men could study these chapters in the book of Proverbs without experiencing a healthy revolt against the iniquity which is unveiled; while few men can read the works of modern realism without contracting a certain contamination, without a dimming of the moral sense and a weakening of the purer impulses.

We need not then complain that the powers of imaginative description are summoned to heighten the picture of the temptation, because the same powers are used with constraining effect to paint the results of yielding to it. We need not regret that the Temptress, Mistress Folly, as she is called, is allowed to utter all her blandishments in full, to weave her spells before our eyes, because the voice of Wisdom is in this way made more impressive and convincing. Pulpit invectives against sin often lose half their terrible cogency because we are too prudish to describe the sins which we denounce.

I. *The glamours of sin and the safeguard against*

[1] The Laureate has touched with stern satire on this debased modern Realism:—

"Author, atheist, essayist, novelist, realist, rhymester, play your part,
Paint the mortal shame of Nature with the living hues of Art.
Rip your brothers' vices open, strip your own foul passions bare,
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence—forward—naked—let them stare!
Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of your sewer,
Send the drain into the fountain lest the stream should issue pure.
Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism,
Forward, forward,—aye and backward, downward too into the abysm!"

—*The new Locksley Hall.*

them.—There is no sin which affords so vivid an example of seductive attraction at the beginning, and of hopeless misery at the end, as that of unlawful love. The illustration which we generally prefer, that drawn from the abuse of alcoholic drinks, occurs later on in the book, at xxiii. 31, 32; but it is not so effectual for the purpose, and we may be thankful that the Divine Wisdom is not checked in its choice of matter by our present-day notions of propriety.

There are two elements in the temptation: there is the smooth and flattering speech, the outpouring of compliment and pretended affection expressed in vii. 15, the subtle and enflaming suggestion that "stolen waters are sweet;"[1] and there is the beauty of form enhanced by artful painting of the eyelids,[2] and by all those gratifications of the senses which melt the manhood and undermine the resisting power of the victim.[3] In our own time we should have to add still further elements of temptation,—sophistical arguments and oracular utterances of a false science, which encourages men to do for health what appetite bids them do for pleasure.

After all, this is but a type of all temptations to sin. There are weak points in every character; there are places in every life where the descent is singularly easy. A siren voice waylays us with soft words and insinuating arguments; gentle arms are thrown around us, and dazzling visions occupy our eyes; our conscience seems to fade away in a mist of excited feeling; there is a sort of twilight in which shapes are uncertain, and the imagination works mightily with the

[1] Prov. ix. 17. [2] Prov. vi. 25. [3] Prov. vii. 16, 17.

obscure presentations of the senses. We are taken unawares; the weak point happens to be unguarded; the fatal byepath with its smooth descent is, as it were, sprung upon us.

Now the safeguard against the specific sin before us is presented in a true and whole-hearted marriage.[1] And the safeguard against all sin is equally to be found in the complete and constant preoccupation of the soul with the Divine Love. The author is very far from indulging in allegory,—his thoughts are occupied with a very definite and concrete evil, and a very definite and concrete remedy; but instinctively the Christian ear detects a wider application, and the Christian heart turns to that strange and exigent demand made by its Lord, to hate father and mother, and even all human ties, in order to concentrate on Him an exclusive love and devotion. It is our method to state a general truth and illustrate it with particular instances; it is the method of a more primitive wisdom to dwell upon a particular instance in such a way as to suggest a general truth. Catching, therefore, involuntarily the deeper meanings of such a thought, we notice that escape from the allurements of the strange woman is secured by the inward concentration of a pure wedded love. In the permitted paths of connubial intimacy and tenderness are to be found raptures more sweet and abiding than those which are vainly promised by the ways of sin.

> "Here Love his golden shafts employs, here lights
> His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,
> Reigns here and revels; not in the bought smile
> Of harlots, loveless, joyless, unendeared."[2]
>
> *Paradise Lost.*

[1] Prov. v. 15-19.

Forbidding to marry is a device of Satan; anything which tends to degrade or to desecrate marriage bears on its face the mark of the Tempter. It is at our peril that we invade the holy mystery, or brush away from its precincts the radiant dews which reflect the light of God. Nay, even the jest and the playful teasing which the subject sometimes occasions are painfully inappropriate and even offensive. We do ill to smile at the mutual absorption and tender endearments of the young married people; we should do better to pray that their love might grow daily more absorbing and more tender. I would say to brides and bridegrooms: Magnify the meaning of this sacred union of yours; try to understand its Divine symbolism. Labour diligently to keep its mystical passion pure and ardent and strong. Remember that love needs earnest, humble, self-suppressing cultivation, and its bloom is at first easily worn off by negligence or laziness. Husbands, labour hard to make your assiduous and loving care more manifest to your wives as years go by. Wives, desire more to shine in the eyes of your husbands, and to retain their passionate and chivalrous admiration, than you did in the days of courtship.

Where marriage is held honourable,—a sacrament of heavenly significance,—where it begins in a disinterested love, grows in educational discipline, and matures in a complete harmony, an absolute fusion of the wedded souls, you have at once the best security against many of the worst evils which desolate society, and the most exquisite type of the brightest and loveliest spiritual state which is promised to us in the world to come.

Our sacred writings glorify marriage, finding in it more than any other wisdom or religion has found.

The Bible, depicting the seductions and fascinations of sin, sets off against them the infinitely sweeter joys and the infinitely more binding fascinations of this condition which was created and appointed in the time of man's innocence, and is still the readiest way of bringing back the Paradise which is lost.

II. *The binding results of sin.*—It is interesting to compare with the teaching of this chapter the doctrine of Karma in that religion of Buddha which was already winning its victorious way in the far East at the time when these introductory chapters were written. The Buddha said in effect to his disciple, "You are in slavery to a tyrant set up by yourself. Your own deeds, words, and thoughts, in the former and present states of being, are your own avengers through a countless series of lives. If you have been a murderer, a thief, a liar, impure, a drunkard, you must pay the penalty in your next birth, either in one of the hells, or as an unclean animal, or as an evil spirit, or as a demon. You cannot escape, and I am powerless to set you free. Not in the heavens," so says the Dhammapada, "not in the midst of the sea, not if thou hidest thyself in the clefts of the mountains, wilt thou find a place where thou canst escape the force of thy own evil actions."

"His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin." This terrible truth is illustrated with mournful emphasis in the sin of the flesh which has been occupying our attention, a sin which can only be described as "taking fire into the bosom or walking upon hot coals," with the inevitable result that the clothes are burnt and the feet are scorched.[1] There are four miseries com-

[1] Prov. vi. 27, 28.

parable to four strong cords which bind the unhappy transgressor. First of all, there is the shame. His honour is given to others,[1] and his reproach shall not be wiped away.[2] The jealous rage of the offended husband will accept no ransom, no expiation;[3] with relentless cruelty the avenger will expose to ruin and death the hapless fool who has transgressed against him. Secondly, there is the loss of wealth. The ways of debauchery lead to absolute want, for the debauchee, impelled by his tormenting passions, will part with all his possessions in order to gratify his appetites,[4] until, unnerved and 'feckless,' incapable of any honest work, he is at his wits' end to obtain even the necessaries of life.[5] For the third binding cord of the transgression is the loss of health; the natural powers decay, the flesh and the body are consumed with loathsome disease.[6] Yet this is not the worst. Worse than all the rest is the bitter remorse, the groaning and the despair at the end of the shortened life. "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!"[7] "Going down to the chambers of death," wise too late, the victim of his own sins remembers with unspeakable agony the voice of his teachers, the efforts of those who wished to instruct him.

There is an inevitableness about it all, for life is not lived at a hazard; every path is clearly laid bare from its first step to its last before the eyes of the Lord; the ups and downs which obscure the way for us are all level to Him.[8] Not by chance, therefore, but

[1] Prov. v. 9.
[2] Prov. vi. 33.
[3] Prov. vi. 34, 35.
[4] Prov. v. 10.
[5] Prov. vi. 26.
[6] Prov. v 11.
[7] Prov. v. 12-14.
[8] Prov. v. 21.

by the clearest interworking of cause and effect, these fetters of sin grow upon the feet of the sinner, while the ruined soul mourns in the latter days.[1] The reason why Wisdom cries aloud, so urgently, so continually, is that she is uttering eternal truths, laws which hold in the spiritual world as surely as gravitation holds in the natural world; it is that she sees unhappy human beings going astray in the greatness of their folly, dying because they are without the instruction which she offers.[2]

But now, to turn to the large truth which is illustrated here by a particular instance, that our evil actions, forming evil habits, working ill results on us and on others, are themselves the means of our punishment.

> "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us."[3]

We do not rightly conceive God or Judgment or Hell until we recognize that in spiritual and moral things there is a binding law, which is no arbitrary decree of God, but the essential constitution of His universe. *He* does not punish, but sin punishes; *He* does not make hell, but sinners make it. As our Lord puts it, the terrible thing about all sinning is that one may become involved in an eternal sin.[4] It is by an inherent necessity that this results from a sin against the Holy Spirit within us.

We cannot too frequently, or too solemnly, dwell

[1] It is, if we may say so, a maxim of modern science that "A sin without punishment is as impossible, as complete a contradiction in terms, as a cause without an effect" (W. R. Gregg).

[2] Prov. v. 23.

[3] *King Lear.*

[4] Mark iii. 26.

upon this startling fact. It is a fact established, not by a doubtful text or two, nor by a mere *ipse dixit* of authority, but by the widest possible observation of life, by a concurrent witness of all teachers and all true religions. No planetary movement, no recurrence of the seasons, no chemical transformation, no physiological growth, no axiom of mathematics, is established on surer or more irrefutable grounds. Sin itself may even be defined, from an induction of facts, as "the act of a human will which, being contrary to the Divine Will, reacts with inevitable evil upon the agent." Sin is a presumptuous attempt on the part of a human will to disturb the irresistible order of the Divine Will, and can only draw down upon itself those lightnings of the Divine power, which otherwise would have flashed through the heavens beautiful and beneficent.

Let us, then, try to impress upon our minds that, not in the one sin of which we have been speaking only, but in all sins alike, certain bands are being woven, certain cords twisted, certain chains forged, which must one day take and hold the sinner with galling stringency.

Every sin is preparing for us a band of shame to be wound about our brows and tightened to the torture-point. There are many gross and generally condemned actions which when they are exposed bring their immediate penalty. To be discovered in dishonourable dealing, to have our hidden enormities brought into the light of day, to forfeit by feeble vices a fair and dignified position, will load a conscience which is not quite callous with a burden of shame that makes life quite intolerable. But there are many sins which do not entail this scornful censure of our fellows, sins with which *they* have a secret sympathy, for which *they* cherish an ill-disguised

admiration,—the more heroic sins of daring ambition, victorious selfishness, or proud defiance of God. None the less these tolerated iniquities are weaving the inevitable band of shame for the brow: we shall not always be called on only to face our fellows, for we are by our creation the sons of God, in whose image we are made, and eventually we must confront the children of Light, must look straight up into the face of God, with these sins—venial as they were thought—set in the light of His countenance. Then will the guilty spirit burn with an indescribable and unbearable shame,—"To hide my head! To bury my eyes that they may not see the rays of the Eternal Light," will be its cry. May we not say with truth that the shame which comes from the judgment of our fellows is the most tolerable of the bands of shame?

Again, every sin is preparing for us a loss of wealth, of the only wealth which is really durable, the treasure in the heavens; every sin is capable of "bringing a man to a piece of bread,"[1] filching from him all the food on which the spirit lives. It is too common a sight to see a young spendthrift who has run through his patrimony in a few years, who must pass through the bankruptcy court, and who has burdened his estate and his name with charges and reproaches from which he can never again shake himself free. But that is only a superficial illustration of a spiritual reality. Every sin is the precursor of spiritual bankruptcy; it is setting one's hand to a bill which, when it comes in, must break the wealthiest signatory.

That little sin of yours, trivial as it seems,—the mere inadvertence, the light-hearted carelessness, the petty

[1] Prov. vi. 26.

spleen, the innocent romancing, the gradual hardening of the heart,—is, if you would see it, like scratching with a pen through and through a writing on a parchment. What is this writing? What is this parchment? It is a title-deed to an inheritance, the inheritance of the saints in light. You are quietly erasing your name from it and blotching its fair characters. When you come to the day of account, you will show your claim, and it will be illegible. "What," you will say, "am I to lose this great possession for this trifling scratch of the pen?" "Even so," says the Inexorable; "it is precisely in this way that the inheritance is lost; not, as a rule, by deliberate and reckless destruction of the mighty treasure, but by the thoughtless triviality, the indolent easifulness. See you, it is the work of your own hand. *His own iniquities shall take the wicked.*"

Again, every sin is the gradual undermining of the health, not so much the body's, as the soul's health. Those are, as it were, the slightest sins by which "the flesh and the body are consumed." "Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes?" Who is stricken and hurt and beaten, bitten as if by an adder, stung as if by a serpent?[1] It is the victim of drink, and every feature shows how he is holden by the cords of his sin. But there is one who is drunk with the blood of his fellow-men, and has thriven at the expense of the poor, who yet is temperate, healthy, and strong. The disease of his soul does not come to the light of day. None the less it is there. The sanity of soul which alone can preserve the life in the Eternal World and in the presence of God is

[1] Prov. xxiii. 29, 32.

fatally disturbed by every sin. A virus enters the spirit; germs obtain a lodgment there. The days pass, the years pass. The respected citizen, portly, rich, and courted, goes at last in a good old age from the scene of his prosperity here,—surely to a fairer home above?

Alas, the soul if it were to come into those fadeless mansions would be found smitten with a leprosy. This is no superficial malady; through and through the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint. Strange that men never noticed it down there in the busy world. But the fact is, *it is the air of heaven which brings out these suppressed disorders.* And the diseased soul whispers, "Take me out of this air, I beseech you, at all costs. I must have change of climate. This atmosphere is intolerable to me. I can only be well out of heaven." "Poor spirit," murmur the angels, "he says the truth; certainly he could not live here."

Finally, the worst chain forged in the furnace of sin is Remorse: for no one can guarantee to the sinner an eternal insensibility; rather it seems quite unavoidable that some day he must awake, and standing shamed before the eyes of his Maker, stripped of all his possessions and hopelessly diseased in soul, must recognize clearly what might have been and now cannot be. Memory will be busy. "Ah! that cursed memory!" he cries. It brings back all the gentle pleadings of his mother in that pure home long ago; it brings back all his father's counsels; it brings back the words which were spoken from the pulpit, and all the conversations with godly friends. He remembers how he wavered—"Shall it be the strait and hallowed road, or shall it be the broad road of destruction?" He remembers all the pleas and counterpleas, and how

with open eyes he chose the way which, as he saw, went down to death. And now? Now it is irrevocable. He said he would take his luck, and he has taken it. He said God would not punish a poor creature like him. God does not punish him. No, there is God making level all his paths now as of old. This punishment is not God's; it is his own. *His own iniquities have taken the wicked; he is held with the cords of his sin.*

Here then is the plain, stern truth,—a law, not of Nature only, but of the Universe. As you look into a fact so solemn, so awful; as the cadence of the chapter closes, do you not seem to perceive with a new clearness how men needed One who could take away the sins of the world, One who could break those cruel bonds which men have made for themselves?

VI.

CERTAIN EXAMPLES OF THE BINDING CHARACTER OF OUR OWN ACTIONS.

"The surety . . . the sluggard . . . and the worthless person."—PROV. vi. 1, 6, 12.

FROM the solemn principle announced at the close of the last chapter the teacher passes, almost unconscious of the thought which determines his selection of subjects, to illustrate the truth by three examples, —that of the Surety, that of the Sluggard, that of the Worthless Man. And then, because the horrors of impurity are the most striking and terrible instance of all, this subject, coming up again at v. 20, like the dark ground tone of the picture, finally runs into the long and detailed description of chap. vii.

These three examples are full of interest, partly because of the light they throw on the habits and moral sentiments of the time in which this Introduction was written, but chiefly because of the permanent teaching which is luminous in them all, and especially in the third.

We may spend a few minutes upon the first. The young man finding his neighbour in monetary difficulties, consents in an easy-going way to become his surety; he enters into a solemn pledge with the creditor, probably a Phœnician money-lender, that he will him-

self be responsible if the debtor is not prepared to pay at the appointed time. He now stands committed; he is like a roe that is caught by the hunter, or a bird that is held by the fowler, in the hand of his neighbour. His peace of mind, and his welfare, depend no longer upon himself, but upon the character, the weakness, the caprice of another. This is a good illustration of the way in which a thoughtless action may weave cruel bands to bind the unwary. Looking at the matter from this point of view, our book strongly and frequently denounces the practice of suretiship. To become surety for another shows that you are void of understanding. So foolish is the action that it is compared to the surrender of one's own garments, and even to the loss of personal freedom. A proverb declares: "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it, but he that hateth suretiship is sure."[1]

If then the young man has immeshed himself in obligations of this kind, he is recommended to spare no pains, not to stand upon a false pride, but to go with all urgency, with frank abasement, to the man for whom he has pledged his credit, and at all costs to get released from the obligation. "Be thou not," says Wisdom, "one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts: if thou hast not wherewith to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?"[2]

We feel at once that there is another side to the question. There may be cases in which a true brotherliness will require us to be surety for our friend. "An honest man is surety for his neighbour, but he that is

[1] See Prov. xvii. 18, xx. 16, repeated in xxvii. 13, and especially xi. 15.

[2] Prov. xxii. 26, 27.

impudent will forsake him," says Ecclesiasticus. And from another point of view an injunction has to be given to one who has persuaded his friend to stand as his surety,—"Forget not the friendship of thy surety, for he hath given his life for thee. A sinner will overthrow the good estate of his surety, and he that is f an unthankful mind will leave him in danger that delivered him." But confining ourselves to the standpoint of the text, we may well raise a note of warning against the whole practice. As Ecclesiasticus himself says, "Suretiship hath undone many of good estate, and shaken them as a wave of the sea: mighty men hath it driven from their houses, so that they wandered among strange nations. A wicked man transgressing the commandments of the Lord shall fall into suretiship."[1]

We may say perhaps that the truly moral course in these relations with our fellows lies here: if we can afford to be a surety for our neighbour, we can clearly afford to lend him the money ourselves. If we cannot afford to lend it to him, then it is weak and foolish, and may easily become wicked and criminal, to make our peace of mind dependent on the action of a third person, while in all probability it is hurtful to our friend himself, because by consenting to divide the risks with the actual creditor we tend to lessen in the debtor's mind the full realization of his indebtedness, and thus encourage him in shifty courses and unnerve his manly sense of responsibility. The cases in which it is wise as well as kind to become bail for another are so rare that they may practically be ignored in this connection;

[1] Eccles. xxix. 14, 16, 17, 18, 19.

and when these rare occasions occur they may safely be left to the arbitrament of other principles of conduct which in the present instance are out of view. Here it is enough to emphasise what a miserable chain thoughtlessness in the matter of suretiship may forge for the thoughtless.

We may now pass to our second illustration, the poverty and ruin which must eventually overtake *the Sluggard.* "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns. The face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I beheld, and considered well: I saw, and received instruction."[1] And there is the lazy owner of this neglected farm murmuring, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." There seem to be in every community a certain number of people who can only be described as constitutionally incapable: as children they are heavy and phlegmatic; at school they are always playing truant, and exerting themselves, if at all, to escape the irksome necessity of learning anything; when they enter into life for themselves they have no notion of honest effort and steady persistency, but directly their employment becomes distasteful they quit it; and at length, when they end their days in the workhouse, or in those shameful haunts of sin and vice to which sloth so easily leads, they have the melancholy reflection to take with them to the grave that they have proved themselves an encumbrance of the earth, and can be welcomed in no conceivable world. Now the question

[1] Prov. xxiv. 30-34; see for a fuller treatment of the subject Lecture XX.

must force itself upon our attention, Might not these incapables be rescued if they were taken young enough, and taught by wholesome discipline and a wise education what will be the inevitable issue of their lethargic tendencies? Might not the farm of the sluggard be impressed on their very eyeballs as a perpetual and effective warning?

Leaving this important question to social reformers, we may note how beautifully this book employs the examples of insect life to teach and stimulate human beings. "The ants are a people not strong. Yet they provide their meat in summer. . . . The locusts have no king. Yet go they forth all of them by bands."[1] "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no chief, overseer,[2] or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."[3] By this little touch the book of Proverbs has turned the magnificent fields of modern scientific observation, and all the astonishing revelations of the microscope, into a school of moral and spiritual discipline for human life. Thus the ants swarm in the woods and the fields as if to rebuke the laziness and thriftlessness of man. They work night and day; they store their galleries with food; they capture and nourish aphides, which they use as a kind of domestic cattle. The vast and symmetrical mounds, which they rear as habitations and barns, are, relatively to the size of the builders, three or four times larger than the pyramids. By what mysterious instinct those long lines of

[1] Prov. xxx. 25-27.

[2] It is the word used in Exod. v. 6 of those who directed the tasks of the Israelites in Egypt.

[3] Prov. vi. 6-8.

labourers march and work in unison; by what half-human impulses they form in serried hosts and engage in deadly battles prolonged through several days; by what ludicrous freaks they are led to imitate men, spending their lives in pampered luxury, dependent upon slaves, until at last in their helplessness they are mastered by their bondservants in revolt; by what heavenly motive they are stirred to feed and nourish and nurse one another in sickness and trouble,—we need not here enquire, for we are only told to go to the ant in order to learn her ways of ceaseless activity. But in this brief precept we seem to receive a hint of the boundless instruction and warning to be derived from the humbler inhabitants of this earth which man claims as his own.

Let us pass to the *third* illustration of the theme. The surety is the victim of easygoing thoughtlessness, the sluggard is the victim of laziness and incapacity; but now there appears on the scene the thoroughly worthless character, the man of Belial, and after his portrait is drawn in a few touches, his sudden and hopeless ruin is announced in a way which is all the more striking because the connection between the sin and its punishment is left to be guessed rather than explained.[1] The description of this person is wonderfully graphic and instructive, and we must dwell for a moment on the details. We see him, not in repose, but busy going from place to place, and talking a great deal. His lips are shaped continually to lie,—"he walketh with a froward mouth." There is no straightforwardness about him; he is full of hint, suggestion,

[1] Prov. vi. 12-15.

innuendo; he gives you always the idea that he has an accomplice in the background; he turns to you and winks in a knowing way; he has a habit of shuffling with his feet, as if some evil spirit forbade him to stand still; you constantly catch him gesticulating; he points with his thumb over his shoulder, and nods significantly; he is never better pleased than when he can give the impression of knowing a great deal more than he cares to say. He delights to wrap himself in mystery—to smile blandly and then relapse into a look of inscrutability—to frown severely and then assume an air of gentle innocence. He is in the habit of beckoning one into a corner, and making a whispered communication as if he were your particular friend, as if he had taken a fancy to you directly he saw you, and was therefore eager to give you some information which nothing would induce him to divulge to anyone else; if you are foolish enough to share his confidences, he gives you very soon, when others are standing by, a cunning leer, as if to intimate that you and he are old acquaintances, and are in the secret, which the rest do not know.[1]

The fact is that his heart is as deceitful as his lips; he cannot be true on any terms. If some simple and open course occurred to his mind he would shun it instinctively, because it is in devising evil that he lives and moves and has his being. His friendliest approaches fill an honest man with misgiving, his words of affection or admiration send a cold shudder through one's frame. His face is a mask; when it looks fair you suspect villainy; when it looks villainous, and then

[1] *Cf.* the proverb xvi. 30—"He that shutteth his eyes, it is to devise froward things: he that compresseth his lips bringeth evil to pass."

only, you recognize that it is true. Wherever he goes he makes mischief, he causes divisions; he is the Iago of every play in which he takes a part, the Judas of every society of which he is a member. He manages to sow suspicion in the mind of the least suspicious, and to cast a slur on the character of the most innocent. When he has created discord between friends he is delighted. If he sees them disposed to a reconciliation, he comes forward as a mediator and takes care to exasperate the differences, and to make the breach irreparable. Like Edmund in *King Lear*, he has a genius for setting men at variance, and for so arranging his plots that each party thinks he hears with his own ears and sees with his own eyes the proof of the other's perfidy. But, unlike Edmund, he does the mischief, not for any special good to himself, but for the mere delight of being an agent of evil.

It is this kind of man that is the pest of commerce. He introduces dishonest practices into every business that he touches. He makes it a principle that in selling you are to impose on the customer, avail yourself of his ignorance or prejudice or weakness, and hide everything which might incline him to draw back; while in buying you are to use any fraud or panic or misrepresentation which might induce the seller to lower the price.[1] When he has been in a business for a little while the whole concern becomes tainted, there is a slime over everything; the very atmosphere is fetid.

It is this kind of man that is the bane of every social circle. In his presence, all simplicity and innocence, all charity and forbearance and compassion,

[1] *Cf.* Prov. xx. 14: "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth."

seem to wither away. If you are true and straightforward he manages to make you ridiculous; under his evil spell you seem a simpleton. All genial laughter he turns into sardonic smiles and sneers; all kindly expressions he transforms into empty compliments which are not devoid of a hidden venom. He is often very witty, but his wit clings like an eating acid to everything that is good and pure; his tongue will lodge a germ of putrescence in everything which it touches.

It is this kind of man that is the leaven of hypocrisy and malice in the Christian Church; he intrigues and cabals. He sets the people against the minister and stirs up the minister to suspect his people. He undertakes religious work, because it is in that capacity he can do most mischief. He is never better pleased than when he can pose as the champion of orthodoxy, because then he seems to be sheltered and approved by the banner which he is defending.

"*Therefore* shall his calamity come suddenly."[1] It is because the character is so incurably base, so saturated with lies and insincerities, that there can be no gradations or temperings in his punishment. One who is less evil may be proved and tested with slight troubles, if possibly he may be stirred to amendment. But this utterly worthless person is quite unaffected by the smaller trials, the tentative disciplines of life. He cannot be chastised as a son; he can only be broken as a vessel in which there is an intrinsic flaw; or as a building, which has got the plague in its very mortar and plaster.

We are told that in Sierra Leone the white ants

[1] It is probably assumed that warnings and corrections have been

will sometimes occupy a house, and eat their way into all the woodwork, until every article in the house is hollow, so that it will collapse into dust directly it is touched. It is so with this deceitful character, so honeycombed, and eaten through, that though for years it may maintain its plausible appearance in the world, few people even suspecting the extent of the inward decay, on a sudden the end will come; there will be one touch of the finger of God, and the whole ill-compacted, worm-devoured thing will crumble into matchwood: "He shall be broken, and that without remedy."

But while we are thus watching this worthless soul overtaken with an inevitable calamity, we are reminded that not only are our eyes upon him, but the Lord also sees him. And to that calm and holy watcher of the poor sinful creature there are six things which appear specially hateful—seven which are an abomination of His soul.[1] Is there not a kind of comfort in the thought that the Lord watches and knows the whole story of that miserable life, not leaving it to us to condemn, but taking upon Himself the whole responsibility? He knows whether there is a reason in nature for these bad hearts; He knows too what power outside of nature can change and redeem them. But at present we want only to mark and consider these seven things which are abominable to God—the seven prominent traits of the character which has just been depicted. We seem to need some spiritual quickening,

given him in vain—*cf.* Prov. xxix. 1: "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be broken, and that without remedy."

[1] Prov. vi. 16-19.

that we may observe these hateful things not only with our own natural repugnance, but with something of the holy hatred and the inward loathing which they produce in the Divine mind.

1. *Haughty eyes.* "There is a generation, Oh how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up."[1] And to that generation how many of us belong, and what secret admiration do we cherish for it, even when we can honestly disclaim any blood relationship! That haughty air of the great noble; that sense of intrinsic superiority; that graciousness of manner which comes from a feeling that no comparison can possibly be instituted between the great man and his inferiors; that way of surveying the whole earth as if it were one's private estate; or that supreme satisfaction with one's private estate as if it were the whole earth! This lofty pride, when its teeth are drawn so that it cannot materially hurt the rest of mankind, is a subject of mirth to us; but to the Lord it is not, it is hateful and abominable; it ranks with the gross vices and the worst sins; it is the chief crime of Satan.

2. *A lying tongue*, though it "is but for a moment."[2] It is the sure sign of God's intense hatred against lies that they recoil on the head of the liar, and are the harbingers of certain destruction. We dislike lies because of their social inconvenience, and where some social convenience is served by them we connive at them and approve. But God hates the lying tongue, whatever apparent advantage comes from it. If we lie for personal gain He hates it. If we lie from

[1] Prov. xxx. 13. See Lecture XIII. for the teaching of the Proverbs on Pride.

[2] Prov. xii. 19.

mere weakness, He hates it. If we lie in the name of religion, and in the fashion of the Jesuit, for the welfare of men and the salvation of souls, He hates it none the less. The abomination does not consist in the motive of the lie, but in the lie itself.

3. *Hands that shed innocent blood.* So hateful are they to Him that He could not let David His chosen servant build Him a house because this charge could be laid against the great king. The soldier in the battle-field hewing down the man who is innocent, and the man who in carelessness or greed is wearing the poor, who are dependent on him, down to death, and the man who in a passion rises up and murders his fellow,—these are very hateful to the Lord. There at the beginning of the world's history, in the blood of righteous Abel crying to the Lord, and in the mark set on the guilty brow of Cain, the heart of God was clearly and finally shown. He has not changed. He does not shed innocent blood Himself; He cannot away with them that shed it.

4. Hateful too to Him is *the devising heart,* even where courage or opportunity fails of realizing the device. There are so many more murderers in the world than we see, so many cruel and wicked deeds restrained by the police or by a dominant public sentiment, which yet lie deep in the wicked imaginations of our hearts, and are abominable to God, that we may be thankful if we do not see as He sees, and may wonder at the forbearance of His compassion.

5. *Feet that be swift in running to mischief.* Feet listless in the ways of brotherly service or holy worship, but swift, twinkling with eager haste, when any mischief is toward, are marked by God—and hated.

6. And *a false witness* is abominable to Him, the poisoner of all social life, the destroyer of all justice between man and man. Again and again in this book is censure passed upon this unpardonable crime.[1]

7. Finally, as the blessing of Heaven descends on the peacemaker, so the hatred of God assails the man *who sows discord among brethren.*

Such is the character that God abominates, the character which binds itself with cords of penalty and falls into irretrievable ruin. And then, after this disquisition on some of the vices which destroy the individual life and disturb society, our author turns again to that snaring vice which is so much the more destructive because it comes under the guise, not of hate, but of love. Those other vices after all bear their evil on their faces, but this is veiled and enchanted with a thousand plausible sophistries; it pleads the instincts of nature, the fascinations of beauty, the faults of the present social state, and even advances the august precepts of science. Surely in a way where such a danger lurks we need a commandment which will shine as a lamp, a law which will be itself a light (ver. 23).

[1] See Prov. xii. 17; xiv. 5, 25; xix. 5, 9. A crime, it may be remembered, which would be much more common and much more fatal in a primitive state of society, where on the one hand legal procedure was less cautious and less searching, and on the other hand the inward sanctions of truth which Christianity has brought home to the modern conscience were but feebly perceived.

VII.

REALISM IN MORAL TEACHING.

"I looked forth through my lattice; and I beheld."—Prov. vii. 6.

THE three chapters which close the introduction of our book (vii.-ix.) present a lively and picturesque contrast between Folly and Wisdom—Folly more especially in the form of vice; Wisdom more generally in her highest and most universal intention. Folly is throughout concrete, an actual woman, pourtrayed with such correctness of detail that she is felt as a personal force. Wisdom, on the other hand, is only personified; she is an abstract conception; she speaks with human lips in order to carry out the parallel, but she is not a human being, known to the writer. As we shall see in the next Lecture, this high Wisdom never took a human shape until the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; Folly, unhappily, had become incarnate in myriads of instances; scarcely any city or place where men congregate was, or is, without its melancholy example. It follows from this difference between the two that the picture of Folly is a piece of vigorous realism, while the account of Wisdom is a piece of delicate idealism. Folly is historical, Wisdom is prophetic. In this chapter we are concerned with facts which the author witnessed from the window of his house looking forth

through the lattice.[1] In the next chapter we shall touch on ideas which he had not seen, and could not have seen unless it were in lofty vision looking out through the lattice of the soul. In the present chapter we have an opportunity of noticing the immense value and power of pictorial delineation and concrete images in moral teaching; in the next we shall experience the peculiar fascination and inspiration of beautiful abstract conceptions, of disembodied ideals which, so far as we know at the time, are not capable of actual realization.

It is important to remember this difference in order to understand why Wisdom, the shadowy contrast to that Mistress Folly who was only too concrete and familiar, shaped itself to the writer's mind as a fair and stately woman, a queenly hostess inviting simple ones to her feast; though, as Christians have learnt, the historical embodiment of Wisdom was a man, the Word of God, who of God was made unto us wisdom.

Now before we take our stand at the window and look through the lattice into the street, we must notice the exhortations to the young man to make wisdom and understanding his intimate friends, with which the chapter begins. The law is to be kept as the apple of the eye, which is so sensitive, so tender, and at the same time so surpassingly important, that the lid has to shield it by a quick instinctive movement outrunning thought, and the hand has to be ready at all times to come to its succour. The commandments are to be written on the fingers, like engraved rings, which would serve as instant reminders in unwary moments; the very instruments through which the evil would be done are to be claimed and sealed and inscribed by the

[1] Prov. vii. 6.

righteousness which can preserve from evil, while in the secret tablets of the heart the holy truths are to be written; so that if, in the business of life, the writing on the fingers may get blurred or effaced, the principles of righteousness may yet be kept like priceless archives stored in the inviolable chambers of the inner man. Wisdom is to be treated as a sister,[1] not as if there were a natural kinship, but on the ground of the beautiful influence which a true sister, a pure woman soul, exercises over a young man's life. It is given to a sister again and again, by unfailing sympathy and by sweet comprehending ways, not teasing nor lecturing, but always believing and hoping and loving, to weave a magical spell of goodness and truth around a brother who is exposed to dangerous temptations; she will "maintain for him a saving intercourse with his true self;" when the fires of more ardent affections are burning low, or extinguished in doubt or disgust, she will be with him like a calm impersonal presence, unobtrusive, unforgotten, the more potent because she makes no show of power. Such a lovely fraternal relation is to be maintained with Wisdom, constant as a tie of blood, firm as a companionship from earliest infancy, yet exalted and enthusiastic in its way, and promising a lifelong attraction and authority.

This blessed kinship with Understanding should save the young man from such a fate as we are now to contemplate.

It is twilight, not yet absolutely dark, but the shuddering horror of the scene seems to quench the doubtful glimmer of evening and to plunge the observer suddenly into midnight.[2] There is a young man coming

[1] Prov. vii. 4. [2] Prov. vii. 9.

round the corner of the street. His is no manly walk, but an idle, effeminate saunter—a detail which is not brought out in the English Version.[1] He is a dandy and sadly empty-headed. Now all young men, good and bad alike, pass through a period of dandyism, and it has its uses; but the better the stuff of which the man is made, the more quickly he gets over the crisis, and returns to his senses. This young man is "void of understanding;" his dandyism will be chronic. His is a feeble will and a prurient mind; but his special weakness consists in this, that he thinks he can always resist temptation, and therefore never hesitates to thrust himself in its way. It is as if one were to pride himself on being able to hang on with his fingers to the rim of a well: he is always hanging there, and a touch will send him in. One who is in his own opinion weaker would give the dangerous place a wide berth, and nothing but sheer force would bring him to the edge.

This young dandy has nothing to say for himself. A tempter need not be at the trouble to bring any sound arguments, or to make the worse appear the better reason; to this poor weakling the worse the reason is the better it will appear. As you see him lolling down the path with his leering look and his infinite self-satisfaction—good-natured, but without any other goodness; not with bad intentions, but with everything else bad—you can foresee that he will be

[1] Prov. vii. 8. The term צָעַד describes a special kind of motion, *e.g.*, the slow pacing of the oxen that bare the ark (2 Sam. vi. 15), or the imagined efforts of idols to move (Jer. x. 5); it is therefore unfortunate to render it by the generic word "go." The affected dignity and sauntering insouciance of a dandy are immediately suggested by it, and the shade of meaning is fairly well preserved in the English "saunter."

blown over as easily as a pleasure skiff on a stormy ocean; if you have a compassionate heart you mourn over him at once, for you see the inevitable.

The woman has come out to meet him—like a bird-catcher who has been watching for the unwary bird. Now he should escape at once, for her very attire warns him of her intentions. But this is just his weakness; he delights to place himself in such a position; he would say that it is the proof of his manliness that he can resist. She approaches him with a smirk and a smile, with an open countenance but a closed heart. She utters a sound, moving and pathetic like the murmur of harp-strings;[1] it comes from that inward tumult of passion in the woman's nature which always flutters the heart of a weak youth.[2] She is a wild undisciplined creature; she always hankers after the forbidden; the quiet home ways are insufferable to her; out in the streets, with their excitement, their variety, their suggestions, their possibilities, she forgets, if she does not quiet, her restlessness. The poor woman-nature which, rightly taught and trained, might make the beauty and sweetness of a home, capable of sanctified affections and of self-sacrificing devotion, is here entirely perverted. The passion is poisoned and now poisonous. The energy is diseased. The charms are all spurious. She goes abroad in the blackness of night because in even a faint light her hideousness would appear; under the paint and the finery she is a hag; her eyes are lustreless but for the temporary fire of her corruptions; behind that voice which croons and ripples there is a subdued moan of despair—the jarring of harp-strings

[1] This is the meaning of the word translated 'clamorous.'

[2] So says the Greek version of ver. 10: ἡ ποιεῖ νέων ἐξίπτασθαι καρδίας.

which snap and quiver and shudder and are silent for ever. The wise man looks at her with compassionate loathing, God with pity which yearns to save; but this foolish youth is moved by her as only a fool could be moved. His weak understanding is immediately overcome by her flatteries; his polluted heart does not perceive the poison of her heartless endearments.

She throws her arms round him and kisses him, and he makes no question that it is a tribute to the personal attractions which he has himself often admired in his mirror. She would have him believe that it was he whom she had come out specially to seek, though it would have been just the same whoever had caught her eye; and he, deceived by his own vanity, at once believes her. She has a great deal to say; she does not rely on one inducement, for she does not know with whom she has to do; she pours out therefore all her allurements in succession without stopping to take breath.

First, she holds out the prospect of a good meal. She has abundant meat in the house, which comes from the sacrifice she has just been offering, and it must be eaten by the next day, according to the commandment of the Law.[1] Or if he is not one to be attracted merely by food, she has appeals to his æsthetic side; her furniture is rich and artistic, and her chamber is perfumed with sweet spices. She perceives perhaps by now what a weak, faint-hearted creature, enervated by vice, unmanly and nervous, she has to do with, and she hastens to assure him that his precious skin will be safe. Her goodman is not at home, and his absence

[1] See Lev. vii. 16.

will be prolonged; he took money with him for a long journey, and she knows the date of his return. The foolish youth need not fear, therefore, "that jealousy which is the rage of a man;" he will not have to offer gifts and ransom to the implacable husband, because his deed will never be known. How hollow it all sounds, and how suspicious; surely one who had a grain of understanding would answer with manly scorn and with kindling indignation. But our poor young fool, who was so confident of himself, yields without a struggle; with her mere talk, playing upon his vanity, she bends him as if he were a water-weed in a stream—her appeals to his self-admiration drive him forth as easily as the goads urge an ox to the slaughter-house.

And now you may watch him going after her to destruction!

Is there not a pathos in the sight of an ox going to the slaughter? The poor dumb creature is lured by the offer of food or driven by the lash of the driver. It enters the slaughter-house as if it were a stall for rest and refreshment; it has no idea that "it is for its life." The butcher knows; the bystanders understand the signs; but it is perfectly insensible, taking a transitory pleasure in the unwonted attentions which are really the portents of death. It is not endeared to us by any special interest or affection; the dull, stupid life has never come into any close connection with ours. It has never been to us like a favourite dog, or a pet bird that has cheered our solitary hours. It gave us no response when we spoke to it or stroked its sleek hide. It was merely an animal. But yet it moves our pity at this supreme moment of its life; we do not like

to think of the heavy blow which will soon lay the great slow-pacing form prostrate and still in death.

Here is an ox going to the slaughter,—but it is a fellow-man, a young man, not meant for ignominious death, capable of a good and noble life. The poor degraded woman who lures him to his ruin has no such motive of serviceableness as the butcher has. By a malign influence she attracts him, an influence even more fatal to herself than to him. And he appears quite insensible,—occupied entirely with reflections on his glossy skin and goodly form; not suspecting that bystanders have any other sentiment than admiration of his attractions and approval of his manliness, he goes quietly, unresistingly, lured rather than driven, to the slaughter-house.

The effect of comparison with dumb animals is heightened by throwing in a more direct comparison with other human beings. Transposing the words, with Delitzsch, as is evidently necessary in order to preserve the parallelism of the similitude, we find this little touch: "He goeth after her straightway, as a fool to the correction of the fetters,"—as if the Teacher would remind us that the fate of the young man, tragic as it is, is yet quite devoid of the noble aspects of tragedy. This clause is a kind of afterthought, a modification. "Did we say that he is like the ox going to the slaughter? —nay, there is a certain dignity in that image, for the ox is innocent of its own doom, and by its death many will benefit; with our pity for it we cannot but mingle a certain gratitude, and we find no room for censure; but this entrapped weakling is after all only a fool, of no service or interest to any one, without any of the dignity of our good domestic cattle; in his corrupt and

witless heart is no innocence which should make us mourn. And the punishment he goes to, though it is ruin, is so mean and degrading that it awakes the jeers and scorn of the beholders. As if he were in the village stocks, he will be exposed to eyes which laugh while they despise him. Those who are impure like himself will leer at him; those who are pure will avert their glance with an ill-disguised contempt." There, then, goes the ox to the slaughter; nay, the mere empty-headed fool to the punishment of the fetters, which will keep him out of further mischief, and chain him down to the dumb lifeless creation to which he seems to belong.

But the scorn changes rapidly to pity. Where a fellow-creature is concerned we may not feel contempt beyond that point at which it serves as a rebuke, and a stimulus to better things. When we are disposed to turn away with a scornful smile, we become aware of the suffering which the victim of his own sins will endure. It will be like an arrow striking through the liver. Only a moment, and he will be seized with the sharp pain which follows on indulgence. Oh the nausea and the loathing, when the morning breaks and he sees in all their naked repulsiveness the things which he allowed to fascinate him yester-eve! What a bitter taste is in his mouth; what a ghastly and livid hue is on the cheek which he imagined fair! He is pierced; to miserable physical sufferings is joined a sense of unspeakable degradation, a wretched depression of spirits, a wish to die which is balanced in horrid equilibrium by a fear of death.

And now he will arise and flee out of this loathly house, which seems to be strewn with dead men's bones

and haunted by the moaning spirits of the mighty host which have here gone down into Sheol. But what is this? He cannot flee. He is held like a bird in the snare, which beats its wings and tries to fly in vain; the soft yielding net will rise and fall with its efforts, but will not suffer it to escape. He cannot flee, for if he should escape those fatal doors, before to-morrow's sun sets he will be seized with an over-mastering passion, a craving which is like the gnawing of a vulture at the liver; by an impulse which he cannot resist he will be drawn back to that very corner; there will not be again any raptures, real or imagined, only racking and tormenting desires; there will be no fascination of sight or scent or taste; all will appear as it is—revolting; the perfumes will all be rank and sickly, the meat will all be blighted and fly-blown; but none the less he must back; there, poor, miserable, quivering bird, he must render himself, and must take his fill of—loves? no, of maudlin rapture and burning disgust; solace himself? no, but excite a desire which grows with every satisfaction, which slowly and surely, like that loathsome monster of the seas, slides its clinging suckers around him, and holds him in an embrace more and more deadly until he finally succumbs.

Then he perceives that the fatal step that he took was "for his life," that is, his life was at stake. When he entered into the trap, the die was cast; hope was abandoned as he entered there. The house which appeared so attractive was a mere covered way to hell. The chambers which promised such imagined delights were on an incline which sloped down to death.

Look at him, during that brief passage from his foolish heedlessness to his irretrievable ruin, a Rake's

Progress presented in simple and vivid pictures, which are so terrible because they are so absolutely true.

After gazing for a few minutes upon the story, do we not feel its power? Are there not many who are deaf to all exhortations, who will never attend to the words of Wisdom's mouth, who have a consummate art in stopping their ears to all the nobler appeals of life, who yet will be arrested by this clear presentation of a fact, by the teacher's determination not to blink or underrate any of the attractions and seductions, and by his equal determination not to disguise or diminish any of the frightful results?

We may cherish the sweetness and the purity which reticence will often preserve, but when the sweetness and the purity are lost, reticence will not bring them back, and duty seems to require that we should lay aside our fastidiousness and speak out boldly in order to save the soul of our brother.

But after dwelling on such a picture as this there is a thought which naturally occurs to us; in our hearts a yearning awakes which the book of Proverbs is not capable of meeting. Warnings so terrible, early instilled into the minds of our young men, may by God's grace be effectual in saving them from the decline into those evil ways, and from going astray in the paths of sin. Such warnings ought to be given, although they are painful and difficult to give. But when we have gone wrong through lack of instruction, when a guilty silence has prevented our teachers from cautioning us, while the corrupt habits of society have drawn us insensibly into sin, and a thousand glozening excuses have veiled from our eyes the danger until it is too alte, is there nothing left for us but to sink deeper and

deeper into the slough, and to issue from it only to emerge in the chambers of death?

To this question Jesus gives the answer. He alone can give it. Even that personified Wisdom whose lofty and philosophical utterances we shall hear in the next chapter, is not enough. No advice, no counsel, no purity, no sanctity of example can avail. It is useless to upbraid a man with his sins when he is bound hand and foot with them and cannot escape. It is a mockery to point out, what is only too obvious, that without holiness no man can see God, at a moment when the miserable victim of sin can see nothing clearly except the fact that he is without holiness. "The pure in heart shall see God" is an announcement of exquisite beauty, it has a music which is like the music of the spheres, a music at which the doors of heaven seem to swing open; but it is merely a sentence of doom to those who are not pure in heart. Jesus meets the corrupt and ruined nature with the assurance that He has come "to seek and to save that which was lost." And lest a mere assertion should prove ineffectual to the materialised and fallen spirit, Jesus came and presented in the realism of the Cross a picture of Redemption which could strike hearts that are too gross to feel and too deaf to hear. It might be possible to work out ideally the redemption of man in the unseen and spiritual world. But actually, for men whose very sin makes them unspiritual, there seems to be no way of salvation which does not approach them in a tangible form. The horrible corruption and ruin of our physical nature, which is the work of sin, could be met only by the Incarnation, which should work out a redemption through the flesh.

Accordingly, here is a wonder which none can explain, but which none can gainsay. When the victim of fleshly sin, suffering from the arrow which has pierced his liver, handed over as it seems to despair, is led to gaze upon the Crucified Christ, and to understand the meaning of His bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, he is touched, he is led to repentance, he is created anew, his flesh comes again to him as a little child, he can offer up to God the sacrifice of a contrite heart, and he is cleansed.

This is a fact which has been verified again and again by experience. And they who have marked the power of the Cross can never sufficiently admire the wisdom and the love of God, who works by ways so entirely unlike our ways, and has resources at His command which surpass our conception and baffle our explanation.

If there is a man literally broken down and diseased with sin, enfeebled in will and purpose, tormented by his evil appetite so that he seems like one possessed, the wisest counsels may be without any effect; paint in the most vivid hues the horrible consequences of his sin, but he will remain unmoved; apply the coercion of a prison and all the punishments which are at the disposal of an earthly judge, and he will return to his vicious life with a gusto increased by his recuperated physical strength; present to him the most touching appeals of wife and children and friends, and while he sheds sentimental tears he will continue to run the downward way. But let him be arrested by the spectacle of Christ crucified for him, let the moving thought of that priceless love and untold suffering stir in his heart, let his eyes be lifted never so faintly to those eyes of

Divine compassion,—and though he seemed to have entered the very precincts of the grave, though the heart within him seemed to have died and the conscience seemed to be seared with a hot iron, you will observe at once the signs of returning animation; a cry will go up from the lips, a sob will convulse the frame, a light of passionate hope will come into the eyes. Christ has touched him. Christ is merciful. Christ is powerful. Christ will save.

Ah, if I speak to one who is bound with the cords of his sin, helplessly fettered and manacled, dead as it were in trespasses, I know there is no other name to mention to you, no other hope to hold out to you. Though I knew all science, I could not effectually help you; though I could command all the springs of human feeling, I could not stir you from your apathy, or satisfy the first cries of your awaking conscience. But it is permitted to me to preach unto you—not abstract Wisdom, but—Jesus, who received that name because He should save His people from their sins.

VIII.

THE FIRST-BORN OF THE CREATOR.

"Doth not Wisdom cry?"—Prov. viii. 1.

IN the last chapter a dark and revolting picture of Vice was drawn. This chapter contains a lovely and living picture of Wisdom. In this contrast, as we have already seen, Vice can be presented as a vicious woman, because it is unhappily only too easy to find such an incarnation in actual experience; Wisdom, on the other hand, cannot be presented as an actual person, but only as a personification, because there was, as yet, no Incarnation of Wisdom; far from it, Solomon, the wisest of men, the framer of many wise proverbs, had been in practical conduct an incarnation of folly rather than of wisdom, had himself become a proverb for a wise and understanding heart in combination with a dark and vicious life. Yet how could the teacher fail to feel that some day there must be an Incarnate Wisdom, a contrast to the Incarnate Vice, a conqueror and destroyer of it? In describing Wisdom personified, and in following out her sweet and high-souled utterance, the teacher unconsciously to himself becomes a prophet, and presents, as we shall see, a faint and wavering image of Him who of God was to be made unto men Wisdom, of Him who was actually

to live a concrete human life embodying the Divine Wisdom as completely as many poor stained human lives have embodied the undivine folly of vice. The description, then, is an adumbration of something as yet not seen or fully understood; we must be careful not to spoil its meaning by representing it as more, and by attempting to press the details in explanation of the being and the work of Christ. We shall do wisely to look at the whole picture as it formed itself before the eye of the writer, and to abstain from introducing into it colours or shades of our own. Our first task must be to follow the movement of the chapter as carefully as possible.

Wisdom, unlike the vicious woman who lurks in the twilight at the corner of the street which contains her lair, stands in the open places; she makes herself as manifest as may be by occupying some elevated position, from which her ringing voice may be heard down the streets and up the cross-ways, and may attract the attention of those who are entering the city gates or the doors of the houses. As her voice is strong and clear, so her words are full and rounded; there is no whispering, no muttering, no dark hint, no subtle incitement to secret pleasures; her tone is breezy and stirring as the dawn; there is something about it which makes one involuntarily think of the open air, and the wide sky, and the great works of God.[1] There is the beauty of goodness in all that she says; there is the charming directness and openness of truth; she abhors tortuous and obscure ways; and if some of her sayings seem paradoxes or enigmas, a little difficult

[1] Prov. viii. 1-6.

to understand, that is the fault of the hearer; to a tortuous mind straight things appear crooked; to the ignorant and uninstructed mind the eternal laws of God appear foolishness; but all that she says is plain to one who understands, and right to those who find knowledge.[1] She walks always in a certain and undeviating course—it is the way of righteousness and judgment—and only those who tread the same path can expect to perceive the meaning of what she says, or to appreciate the soundness of all her counsels.[2] And now she proclaims the grounds on which she demands the attention of men, in a noble appeal, which rises to a passionate eloquence and deepens in spiritual significance as it advances. Roughly speaking, this appeal seems to fall into two parts: from ver. 10 to ver. 21 the obvious advantages of obeying her voice are declared, but at ver. 22 the discourse reaches a higher level, and she claims obedience because of her essential nature and her eternal place in the universe of created things.

In the first part Wisdom solemnly states her own value, as compared with the valuables which men usually covet—silver, and gold, and precious stones. That she is of more account than these, appears from the fact that they are but parts of her gifts. In her train come riches; but they differ from ordinary riches in being durable; her faithful followers obtain substantial wealth, and their treasuries insensibly fill.[3] To riches she adds honour, a crown which worldly riches seldom bring, and, what is better still, the honour which she confers is associated with righteousness,

[1] Prov. viii. 7-9. [2] Prov. viii. 20. [3] Prov. viii. 8, 9.

while the spurious honour which is commonly rendered to riches, being conferred without any moral implication, is devoid of any moral appreciation.[1] But after all, she herself is her own best reward; the prosperity which accompanies her seems trivial compared with the desirableness of her own person. Her queenly dwelling is prudence, and at her touch all the charmed regions of knowledge and discovery fly open; they who dwell with her and are admitted to share her secrets find the fruit and the increase of the intellectual life incomparably better than fine gold or choice silver. And what gives to her endowments their peculiar completeness is that she requires a moral culture to go hand in hand with mental development; and leading her disciples to hate evil, and to avoid the arrogance and the pride of the intellect, she rescues knowledge from becoming a mere barren accumulation of facts, and keeps it always in contact with the humanities and with life. Indeed, she finds it one great part of her mighty task to instruct the rulers of men, and to fit them for the fulfilment of their high functions. Her queenly prerogative she shares with all her faithful followers. Since Wisdom is the actual arbiter of human life, the wise man is, as the Stoics would have said, a king; nor can any king be recognized or tolerated who is not wise.[2]

And all these advantages of wealth and honour, of knowledge, and power, and righteousness, are put within the reach of every one. Wisdom is no churl in loving; she loves all who love her. She does not seek to withdraw herself from men; rather she

[1] Prov. viii. 18. [2] Prov. viii. 10-16.

chooses the places and the ways in which she can best attract them. Queenly as she is, she condescends to woo them. Her invitations are general, even universal. And therefore if any do not find her, it is because they do not seek her; if any do not share in her rich gifts and graces, it is because they will not take the trouble to claim them.[1]

But now we pass on to the *second* ground of appeal. Wisdom unveils herself, discloses her origin, shows her heart, stands for a moment on her high celestial throne, that she may make her claims upon the sons of men more irresistible. She was the first creation of God.[2] Before the earth issued out of nothingness she was there. In joyous activity, daily full of delight, she was beside God, as an architect, in the forming of the world. She saw the great earth shaped and clothed for the first time in the mantle of its floods, and made musical with the sound of its fountains. She saw the mountains and the hills built up from their foundations. She saw the formation of the dry land, and of the atoms of dust which go to make the ground.[3] She saw the sky spread out as a firm vault to cover the earth; and she saw God when

[1] Prov. viii. 17.

[2] Prov. viii. 22. There is unfortunately an ambiguity in the word קָנָה. It may mean either "to possess" or "to create." *Cf.* Gen. xiv. 19, 22, where it is impossible to decide between "Possessor of the earth" and "Maker of the earth." That the word might be rendered "got" in this passage is evident from iv. 7, where it is employed; on the other hand, the LXX. renders ἔκτισε, and the author of Ecclesiasticus evidently took it in this sense; *cf.* i. 4, "Wisdom hath been created before all things, and the understanding of prudence from everlasting." In Gen. iv. it is rendered "gotten," but it is quite possible that the joyful mother called her son קַיִן with the feeling that she had created him with the help of the Lord.

[3] Prov. viii. 26.

> " . . . in His hand
> He took the golden compasses, prepared
> In God's eternal store, to circumscribe
> This universe and all created things."[1]

She saw the mighty tides of the ocean restricted to their appointed cisterns, and the firm outlines of the land fixed as their impassable barriers.[2] And this very Wisdom, who thus presided over the formation of land, and sea, and sky, is she who still sports with God's fruitful earth—yes, *sports*, for the great characteristic of Wisdom is her exultant cheerfulness, and it must by no means be supposed that the foolish and the wicked have all the gaiety and mirth as their own.[3] This Wisdom

[1] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, vii. 225.

[2] Prov. viii. 29. It is hardly necessary to point out that the language betrays a complete ignorance of those facts with which astronomy and geology have made us familiar. The author puts into the lips of Wisdom the scientific conceptions of his own time, when the earth was regarded as a flat surface, covered by a solid circular vault, in which the sun, and moon, and stars were fixed. The "circle upon the flood" is probably the apparent circle which is suggested to the observer by the horizon. No one had as yet dreamed that the mountains were thrown up by, not settled in, the surface of the earth, nor was it dreamed that the bounds of the sea are far from being settled, but subject to gradual variations, and even to cataclysmal changes. It may be observed, however, that the voyage of the *Challenger* seems to have established beyond question that the great outlines of land and ocean have remained approximately the same from the beginning. Ocean islands are of volcanic origin or the work of the coral-insect; but the great continents and all contained within the fringe of a thousand-fathom depth from their shores have remained practically unaltered despite the numerous partial upheavals or submergences.

A passage so full of spiritual and moral significance, and yet so entirely untouched by what are to us the elementary conclusions of science, should furnish a valuable criterion in estimating what we are to understand by the Inspiration of such a book as this.

[3] *Cf.* x. 23.

is she too who finds her peculiar delight with the sons of men.

Is it not obvious, then, that men, who are her sons, ought to give ear to her counsels? What could establish a stronger claim for attention than this ancient origin, this honourable part in laying the very foundations of the earth, and this special interest in human life from the beginning? Raised to this high level, where we command so wide a prospect, are we not forced to see that it is our duty, our interest, our joy, to come as humble suitors to the gates of Wisdom, and there to watch, and wait, and seek until we may obtain admission? Must we not search after her, when in finding her we find life and obtain favour of the Lord? Can we not perceive that to miss her is to miss life, to wrong our own souls—to hate her is to love death? Evidently her eagerness to win us is entirely disinterested; though she delights in us, she could easily dispense with us; on the other hand, though we do not delight in her, though we constantly turn a deaf ear to her, and refuse to walk in her ways, she is indispensable to us.

Such a passage as this gives rise to many reflections, and the longer we meditate upon it the more rich and suggestive it appears. Let us try to follow out some of the thoughts which readily present themselves, and especially such as are suggested by the verses which may be described as the poem of creation.

First of all, here is the noble idea which overturns at a touch all mythological speculations about the origin of things—an idea which is in deep harmony

[1] Prov. viii. 22-31.

with all the best knowledge of our own time—that there is nothing fortuitous in the creation of the world; the Creator is not a blind Force, but an Intelligent Being whose first creation is wisdom. He is the origin of a Law by which He means to bind Himself; arbitrariness finds no place in His counsels; accident has no part in His works; in Wisdom hath He formed them all. In all heathen conceptions of creation caprice is supreme, law has no place, blind force works in this way or that, either by the compulsion of a Necessity which is stronger than the gods, or by freaks and whims of the gods which would be contemptible even in men. But here is the clear recognition of the principle that God's Law is a law also to Himself, and that His law is wisdom. He creates the world as an outcome of His own wise and holy design, so that "nothing walks with aimless feet." It is on this theological conception that the possibility of science depends. Until the universe is recognized as an ordered and intelligible system the ordered and intelligent study of it cannot begin. As long as the arbitrary and fortuitous are supposed to hold sway inquiry is paralyzed at its starting-point.

It may, however, be suggested that the doctrine of Evolution, which scientific men are almost unanimous in accepting, is inconsistent with this idea of Creation. By this doctrine our attention is directed to the apparently disordered collision of forces, and the struggle for existence out of which the order and progress of life are educed, and it is hastily assumed that a Wise Intelligence would not work in this way, but would exhibit more economy of resources, more simplicity and directness of method, and more inevitableness of result. But may we not say that the apparent fortuitousness

with which the results are achieved is the clearest evidence of the wise purpose which orders and directs the process? for about the results there can be no question; order, beauty, fitness everywhere prevail; life emerges from the inorganic, thought from life, morality and religion from thought. The more our attention is called to the apparently accidental steps by which these results are reached, the more persuaded must we become that a great and a wise law was at work, that by the side of the Creator, as a master workman, was Wisdom from the beginning. Such a passage as this, then, prepares the way for all science, and furnishes the true conceptions without which science would be sterile. It takes us at a step out of a pagan into a truly religious mode of thinking; it leads us out of the misty regions of superstition to the luminous threshold of the House of Knowledge. It may be said with truth that many scientific facts which are known to us were not known to the writer; and this may raise a prejudice against our book in those minds which can tolerate no thought except that of the present generation, and appreciate no knowledge which is not, as it were, brought up to date; but the fruitful conception is here, here is the right way of regarding the universe, here the preparation of all science.

And now to advance to another idea which is implied in the passage, the idea that in the very conception of the universe human life was contemplated, and regarded with a peculiar delight by the Wisdom of God. The place which Man occupies in creation has been variously estimated in different religious systems and by different religious thinkers. Sometimes he has been regarded as the centre of all things, the

creature for whom all things exist. Then a reaction has set in, and he has been treated as a very insignificant and possibly transient phenomenon in the order of things. It is characteristic of the Bible that it presents a balanced view of this question, avoiding extremes in both directions. On the one hand, it very clearly recognizes that man is a part of the creation, that he belongs to it because he springs out of it, and rules over it only in so far as he conforms to it; on the other hand, it clearly insists on that relation between man and his Creator which is hinted at here. Man is always implicitly connected with God by some half-divine mediator. The Wisdom of God watches with an unmoved heart the growth of the physical world, but into her contemplation of mankind there enters a peculiar delight. There is that in man which can listen to her appeals, can listen and respond. He is capable of rising to the point of view from which she looks out upon the world, and can even see himself in the light in which she sees him. In a word, man, with all his insignificance, has a sublime possibility in him, the possibility of becoming like God; in this he stands quite alone among created things; it is this which gives him his pre-eminence. Thus our passage, while it does not for a moment imply that the material universe was made for the sake of man, or that man in himself can claim a superiority over the other creatures of the earth—and so far takes a view which is very popular with scientific men—yet parts company with the philosophy of materialism in claiming for man a place altogether unique, because he has within him the possibility of being linked to God by means of the Wisdom of God.

And now we may notice another implication of the passage. While Wisdom celebrates her high prerogative as the first-born of the Creator and the instrument of the creation, and urges upon men as parts of the creation the observance of the Moral Law, she is implicitly teaching the great truth which men have been so slow to grasp, that the law of practical righteousness is of a piece with the very laws of creation. To put it in another form, the rules of right conduct are really the rules of the universe applied to human life. Laws of nature, as they are called, and laws of morality have their origin in one and the same Being, and are interpreted to us by one and the same Wisdom. It would be well for us all if we could understand how far-reaching this great truth is, and an intelligent study of this passage certainly helps us to understand it. None of us, in our wildest moments, think of pitting ourselves against the laws of nature. We do not murmur against the law of gravitation; we scrupulously conform to it so far as we can, knowing that if we do not it will be the worse for us. When heavy seas are breaking, and the spirit of the winds is let loose, we do not venture on the waves in a small, open boat, or if we do, we accept the consequences without complaint. But when we come to deal with the moral law we entertain some idea that it is elastic and uncertain, that its requirements may be complied with or not at pleasure, and that we may violate its eternal principles without any serious loss or injury. But the truth is, the Law is one. The only difference arises from the fact that while the natural laws, applying to inanimate objects or to creatures which enjoy no freedom of moral life, are necessarily obeyed, the moral rules apply to conscious reasoning

creatures, who, possessed of freedom, are able to choose whether they will obey the law or not. Yes, the Law is one, and breaches of the Law are punished inevitably both in the natural and in the moral sphere. This same Wisdom, to which "wickedness is an abomination," and which therefore exhorts the sons of men to walk in the ways of righteousness, is the great principle which ordered the physical universe and stamped upon it those laws of uniformity and inevitableness which Science delights to record and to illustrate.

But when we notice how the Wisdom who is here speaking is at once the mouthpiece of the laws which underlie the whole creation and of the laws which govern the moral life, it is easy to perceive how this passage becomes a foreshadowing of that wonderful Being who of God is made unto us Wisdom as well as Righteousness. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, we are able to perceive how this passage is a faint and imperfect glimpse into the nature and the work of Him whom in New Testament phraseology we call the Son of God—faint and imperfect, because this Wisdom, although represented as speaking, is still only an abstraction, a personification, and her relation both to God and to man is described in very vague and indefinite language; and yet, though faint and imperfect, very true as far as it goes, for it recognizes with wonderful distinctness the three truths which we have just been considering, truths that have become luminous for us in Christ; it recognizes, *firstly*, that the world was the creation of Wisdom, of Reason, or, if we may use the New Testament term, of the Word; it recognizes, *secondly*, that the thought of Man was contained in the very thought of creation, and that man was related in

a direct and unique way with the Creator; *lastly*, it recognizes that goodness lies at the very root of creation, and that therefore natural law when applied to human life is a demand for righteousness.

It is interesting to observe that this glimpse, this adumbration of a great truth, which was only to become quite clear in Christ Jesus our Lord, was advanced a little in clearness and completeness by a book which is not generally considered to be inspired, the so-called book of Wisdom, in a passage which must be quoted. "For she [*i.e.* Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty; therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness. And being but one, she can do all things; and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars; being compared with the light, she is found before it."[1]

In this passage Wisdom is still a mere impersonation, but the language employed is evidently very near to that which the New Testament applies to Christ. When Philo came to treat of the idea, and wished to

[1] Wisdom vii. 25–29. The book of Wisdom, a work of the second century B.C., at one time had a place in the canon, and owes its exclusion, in all probability, to the fact that it was written in Greek; as there was no Hebrew original, it was evident that Solomon was not the author. But the use which the Epistle to the Hebrews makes of the passage quoted in the text may suggest how very unnecessary the exclusion from the canon was.

describe this intermediate being between God and man, he employed another term; changing the feminine into the masculine, he spoke of it as the Logos. And this expression is adopted by the Fourth Gospel in describing the Eternal Son before He became flesh; the Word of the fuller revelation is the Wisdom of the Proverbs.

How far Christ recognized in this impersonation of our book a description or representation of Himself it is impossible to say. It is certain that on one occasion, in defending His action against the charges of the Pharisees, He declared, "Wisdom is justified of her children,"[1] a defence which can be most simply explained by supposing that Wisdom stands for Himself. It is certain, too, that He spoke of His own pre-existence,[2] and that the Evangelist assigns to Him in that life before the Incarnation a position not unlike that which is attributed to Wisdom in our passage: "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made. . . No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."[3] But whether our Lord expressly acknowledged the forecast of Himself which is contained in the passage or not, we cannot fail to mark with joy and wonder how strikingly all that is best in the utterance and in the delineation of Wisdom is produced, concrete, tangible, real, in Him.

He, like Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, appears in the busy haunts of man, appeals to them, invites them with large, open-armed generosity. *His* voice

[1] Luke vii. 35; Matt. xi. 19. [2] John viii. 58.
[3] John i. 3, 18.

is to the sons of men. He, like Wisdom, can say with absolute truth, "All the words of My mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverse in them." He too could speak of His teaching as "plain and right," and could with simple literalness declare that His words were more precious than gold, while obedience to Him would cause men "to inherit substance." With what force He might claim that even kings rule by Him we shall only know when the kingdoms of the world have become His in their integrity; but we can see at once how appropriate in His lips is the beautiful saying, "I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me early shall find Me."

With equal suitability might He, the First-born of all creation, the beginning of the creation of God, use the sublime language which follows. And He too could say that His delight was with the sons of men. Yes, how much that means to us! If His delight had not been with us, how could ours ever have been with Him? What a new meaning irradiates every human being when we realize that with him, with her, is the delight of the Son of God! What a revelation lies in the fact, a revelation of what man was by his origin, made in the image of God, and of what he may be in the last event, brought to "the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ." We must not speak as if He delights in us because He has redeemed us; no, He redeemed us because He delighted in us. Is not this a ground on which He may appeal to us, "Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto Me; for blessed are they that keep My ways"? And can we not say to Him with a fervour which the cold abstraction of Wisdom could not possibly excite, "We would watch

daily at Thy gates, waiting at the posts of Thy doors. For when we find Thee we find life and obtain favour of the Lord. When we sin against Thee we wrong our own souls; when we hate Thee we love death"?

Yes, in place of this ancient Wisdom, which, stately and lovely as she is, remains always a little intangible and unapproachable, Christ is made unto us Wisdom, and He speaks to us the old words with a deeper meaning, and new words which none but He could ever speak.

IX.

TWO VOICES IN THE HIGH PLACES OF THE CITY.

CH. IX., VV. 14 WITH 3, AND 16 WITH 4.

AFTER the lengthened contrast between the vicious woman and Wisdom in chaps. vii. and viii., the introduction of the book closes with a little picture which is intended to repeat and sum up all that has gone before. It is a peroration, simple, graphic, and beautiful.

There is a kind of competition between Wisdom and Folly, between Righteousness and Sin, between Virtue and Vice; and the allurements of the two are disposed in an intentional parallelism; the colouring and arrangement are of such a kind that it becomes incredible how any sensible person, or for that matter even the simple himself, could for a moment hesitate between the noble form of Wisdom and the meretricious attractions of Folly. The two voices are heard in the high places of the city; each of them invites the passers-by, especially the simple and unsophisticated—the one into her fair palace, the other into her foul and deadly house. The words of their invitation are very similar: "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him;" but how different is the burden of the two messages! Wisdom

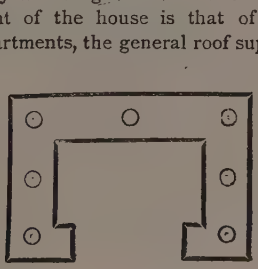
offers life, but is silent about enjoyment; Folly offers enjoyment, but says nothing of the death which must surely ensue.[1]

First of all we will give our attention to the Palace of Wisdom and the voices which issue from it, and then we will note for the last time the features and the arts of Mistress Folly.

The Palace of Wisdom is very attractive; well built and well furnished, it rings with the sounds of hospitality; and, with its open colonnades, it seems of itself to invite all passers-by to enter in as guests. It is reared upon seven well-hewn marble pillars, in a quadrangular form, with the entrance side left wide open.[2] This is no shifting tent or tottering hut, but an eternal mansion, that lacks nothing of stability, or completeness, or beauty. Through the spacious doorways may be seen the great courtyard, in which appear the preparations for a perpetual feast. The beasts are killed and dressed; the wine stands in tall flagons ready mixed for drinking; the tables are spread and decked. All is open, generous, large, a contrast to that unhallowed private supper to which the unwary youth was invited

[1] *Cf.* for this contrast between the two xxiii. 26-28, where Wisdom speaks, and expressly warns against her rival.

[2] The arrangement of the house is that of an open courtyard surrounded with apartments, the general roof supported on the pillars thus



by his seducer.[1] There are no secret chambers, no twilight suggestions and insinuations: the broad light shines over all; there is a promise of social joy; it seems that they will be blessed who sit down together at this board. And now the beautiful owner of the palace has sent forth her maidens into the public ways of the city: theirs is a gracious errand; they are not to chide with sour and censorious rebukes, but they are to invite with winning friendliness; they are to offer this rare repast, which is now ready, to all those who are willing to acknowledge their need of it. "Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled."[2]

We were led to inquire in the last chapter how far our Lord identified Himself with the hypostatic Wisdom who was speaking there, and we were left in some doubt whether He ever consciously admitted the identity; but it is hardly a matter of doubt that this passage was before His mind when He spoke His parable of the Wedding Feast.[3] And the connection is still more apparent when we look at the Greek version of the LXX., and notice that the clause "sent forth her bond-servants" is precisely the same in Prov. ix. 3 and in Matt. xxii. 3. Here, at any rate, Jesus, who describes Himself as "a certain king," quite definitely occupies the place of the ancient Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, and the language which in this passage she employs He, as we shall see, in many slight particulars made His own.

Yes, our Lord, the Wisdom Incarnate, has glorious ideas of hospitality; He keeps open house; His purpose

[1] Prov. vii. 14. [2] Prov. ix. 5. [3] Matt. xxii. 1, *et seq.*

is to call mankind to a great feast; the "bread and the wine" are prepared; the sacrifice which furnishes the meat is slain. His messengers are not commissioned with a mournful or a condemnatory proclamation, but with good tidings which they are to publish in the high places. His word is always, Come. His desire is that men should live, and therefore He calls them into the way of understanding.[1] If a man lacks wisdom, if he recognizes his ignorance, his frailty, his folly, if he is at any rate wise enough to know that he is foolish, well enough to know that he is sick, righteous enough to know that he is sinful, let him approach this noble mansion with its lordly feast. Here is bread which is meat indeed; here is wine which is life-giving, the fruit of the Vine which God has planted.

But now we are to note that the invitation of Wisdom is addressed only to the simple, not to the scorner.[2] She lets the scorner pass by, because a word to him would recoil only in shame on herself, bringing a blush to her queenly face, and would add to the scorner's wickedness by increasing his hatred of her. Her reproof would not benefit him, but it would bring a blot upon herself, it would exhibit her as ineffectual and helpless. The bitter words of a scorner can make wisdom appear foolish, and cover virtue with a confusion which should belong only to vice. "Speak not in the hearing of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."[3] Indeed, there is no character so hopeless as that of the scorner; there proceeds from him, as it were, a fierce blast, which blows away all the approaches which goodness makes to him. Reproof cannot come near him;[4]

[1] Prov. ix. 6.
[2] Prov. ix. 7.
[3] Prov. xxiii. 9.
[4] Prov. xiii. 1.

he cannot find wisdom, though he seek it;[1] and as a matter of fact, he never seeks it.[2] If one attempts to punish him it can only be with the hope that others may benefit by the example; it will have no effect upon him.[3] To be rid of him must be the desire of every wise man, for he is an abomination to all,[4] and with his departure contention disappears.[5] They that scoff at things holy, and scorn the Divine Power, must be left to themselves until the beginnings of wisdom appear in them—the first sense of fear that there is a God who may not be mocked, the first recognition that there is a sanctity which they would do well at all events to reverence. There must be a little wisdom in the heart before a man can enter the Palace of Wisdom; there must be a humbling, a self-mistrust, a diffident misgiving before the scorner will give heed to her invitation.

There is an echo of this solemn truth in more than one saying of the Lord's. He too cautioned His disciples against casting their pearls before swine, lest they should trample the pearls under their feet, and turn to rend those who were foolish enough to offer them such treasure.[6] Men must often be taught in the stern school of Experience, before they can matriculate in the reasonable college of Wisdom. It is not good to give that which is holy to dogs, nor to display the sanctities of religion to those who will only put them to an open shame. Where we follow our own way instead of the Lord's, and insist on offering the treasures of the kingdom to the scorners, we are not acting according to the dictates of Wisdom, we get a blot for that good-

[1] Prov. xiv. 6. [2] Prov. xv. 12. [3] Prov. xix. 25. [4] Prov. xxiv. 9. [5] Prov. xxii. 10. [6] Matt. vii. 6.

ness which we so rashly offer, and often are needlessly rent by those whom we meant to save. It is evident that this is only one side of a truth, and our Lord presented with equal fulness the other side; it was from Him we learnt how the scorner himself, who cannot be won by reproof, can sometimes be won by love; but our Lord thought it worth while to state this side of the truth, and so far to make this utterance of the ancient Wisdom His own.

Again, how constantly He insisted on the mysterious fact that to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken what he hath, precisely in the spirit of this saying: "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning."[1] The entrance into the kingdom, as into the house of Wisdom, is by humility. Except a man turn, and become as a little child, he cannot enter. Wisdom is only justified of her children: until the heart is humble it cannot even begin to be wise; although it may seem to possess a great deal, all must be taken away, and a new beginning must be made—that beginning which is found in the fear of the Lord, and in the knowledge of the Holy One.[2]

The closing words in the invitation of Wisdom are entirely appropriate in the lips of Jesus, and, indeed, only in His lips could they be accepted in their fullest signification. There is a limited sense in which all wisdom is favourable to long life, as we saw in chap. iii., but it is an obvious remark, too, that the wise perish even as the fool; one event happens to them both, and

[1] Prov. ix. 9. *Cf.* xviii. 15, "The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge."

[2] Prov. ix. 10.

there appears to be no difference. But the Incarnate Wisdom, Jesus Christ, was able to say with a broad literalness, "By Me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased." With Him the outlook widened; He could speak of a new life, of raising men up at the last day; He could for the first time give a solution to that constant enigma which has puzzled men from the beginning, How is it that Wisdom promises life, and yet often requires that her children should die? how is it that the best and wisest have often chosen death, and so to all appearance have robbed the world of their goodness and their wisdom? He could give the answer in the glorious truth of the Resurrection; and so, in calling men to die for Him, as He often does, He can in the very moment of their death say to them with a fulness of meaning, "By Me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased."

And then how entirely is it in harmony with all His teaching to emphasize to the utmost the individual choice and the individual responsibility. "If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself: and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." There can be no progress, indeed no beginning, in the spiritual life, until this attitude of personal isolation is understood. It is the last result of true religion that we live in others; but it is the first that we live in ourselves; and until we have learnt to live in ourselves we can be of no use by living in others. Until the individual soul is dealt with, until it has understood the demands which are made upon it, and met them, it is in no position to take its rightful place as a lively stone in the temple of God, or as a living member in the body of Christ. Yes, realize

this searching assurance of Wisdom, let us say, rather, of Christ: if you are like the wise virgins in the parable, it is for your own everlasting good, you shall enter into the hall with the Bridegroom; but if you are like the foolish virgins, no wisdom of the wise can avail you, no vicarious light will serve for your lamps; for you there must be the personal humiliation and sorrow of the Lord's "I know you not."

If with scornful indifference to your high trust as a servant of the Master you hide your talent, and justify your conduct to yourself by pleading that the Master is a hard man, that scorn must recoil upon your own head; so far from the enlarged wealth of the others coming to meet your deficiencies, the misused trifle which you still retain will be taken from you and given to them. Men have sometimes favoured the notion that it is possible to spend a life of scornful indifference to God and all His holy commandments, a life of arrogant self-seeking and bitter contempt for all His other creatures, and yet to find oneself at the end entirely purged of one's contempt, and on precisely equal terms with all pious and humble hearts; but against this notion Wisdom loudly exclaims; it is the notion of Folly, and so far from redeeming the folly, it is Folly's worst condemnation; for surely Conscience and Reason, the heart and the head, might tell us that it is false; and all that is sanest and wisest in us concurs in the direct and simple assurance, "If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it."

Such is the invitation, and such the warning, of Wisdom; such is the invitation, and such the warning, of Christ. Leave off, ye simple ones, and live. After all, most of us are not scorners, but only very foolish, easily

dazzled with false lights, easily misled with smooth utterances which happen to chime in with our own ignorant prejudices, easily seduced into by-paths which in quiet moments we readily acknowledge to be sinful and hurtful. The scorners are but a few; the simple ones are many. Here is this gracious voice appealing to the simple ones, and with a winsome liberality inviting them to the feast of Wisdom.

At the close of ver. 12 the LXX. give a very interesting addition, which was probably translated from a Hebrew original. It seems to have been before our Lord's mind when He drew the description of the unclean spirit walking through waterless places, seeking rest and finding none.[1] The passage is a figurative delineation of the evils which result from making shams and insincerities the support of life, in place of the unfailing sureness and available strength of wisdom; it may be rendered thus: "He who makes falsehood his support shepherds the winds, and will find himself pursuing birds on the wing; for it means leaving the paths of his own vineyard, and wandering over the borders of his own husbandry; it means walking through a waterless wilderness, over land which is the portion of the thirsty; he gathers in his hands fruitlessness." What a contrast to the spacious halls and the bountiful fare of Wisdom! A life based upon everlasting verities may seem for the time cold and desolate, but it is founded upon a rock, and not a barren rock either, for it sends forth in due course corn, and wine, and oil. The children in that house have bread enough and to spare. But when a man prefers make-believe to reality,

[1] Matt. xii. 43.

and follows the apparently pleasant, instead of the actually good, what a clutching of winds it is! what a chase after swift-vanishing birds of joy! The wholesome ways, fruitful, responsive to toil, are left far behind; and here soon is the actual desert, without a drop of water to cool the lips, or a single fruit of the earth which a man can eat. The deluded soul consumed his substance with harlots, and he gathers the wind. The ways of vice are terrible; they produce a thirst which they cannot quench; and they fill the imagination with torturing images of well-being which are farther removed from reality by every step we take. Wisdom bids us to make truth our stay, for after all the Truth is the Way and the Life, and there is no other way, no other life.

And now comes the brief closing picture of Folly, to which again the LXX. give a short addition. Folly is loud, empty-headed as her victims, whom she invites to herself, not as Wisdom invites them, to leave off their simplicity, but rather as like to like, that their ignorance may be confirmed into vice, and their simplicity into brutishness. She has had the effrontery to build her house in the most prominent and lofty place of the city, where by good rights only Wisdom should dwell. Her allurements are specially directed to those who seem to be going right on in their wholesome ways, as if she found her chief delight, not in gratifying the vicious, but in making vicious the innocent. Her charms are poor and tawdry enough; seen in the broad sunlight, and with the wholesome air all round her, she would be revolting to every uncorrupted nature; her clamorous voice would sound strident, and her shameless brow would create a blush of shame in others; she natu-

rally therefore seeks to throw a veil over herself and a glamour over her proposals; she suggests that secrecy and illicitness will lend a charm to what in itself is a sorry delight. It is clandestine, therefore it is to be sweet; it is forbidden, therefore it is to be pleasant. Could anything be more sophistical? That which owes its attraction to the shadows of the night must obviously be intrinsically unattractive. It is an argument fit only for the shades of the lost, and not for those who breathe the sweet air and behold the sun. Her house is indeed haunted with ghosts, and when a man enters her portal he already has his foot in hell. Well may the LXX. add the vehement warning, "Spring away from her clutches; do not linger in the place; let her not have thy name, for thou wilt traverse another's waters; from another's waters hold aloof, from another's fountains do not drink, in order that thou mayest live long, and add to thy years of life."

And now, before leaving this subject, we must briefly remark the great change and advance which Christ has brought into our thought of the relation between the two sexes. This Book of Wisdom is a fair illustration of the contempt in which woman was held by the wise men of Israel. One would suppose that she is the temptress, and man is the victim. The teacher never dreams of going a step backward, and asking whose fault it was that the temptress fell into her vicious ways. He takes no note of the fact that women are first led astray before they lead others. Nor does he care to inquire how the men of his day ruined their women by refusing to them all mental training, all wholesome interest and occupation, shutting them up

in the corrupting atmosphere of the seraglio, and teaching them to regard the domestic sphere, and that only in its narrowest sense, as the proper limit of their thought and affection. It was reserved for the Great Teacher, the Incarnate Wisdom Himself, to redress this age-long injustice to woman, by sternly holding up to men the mirror of truth in which they might see their own guilty hearts.[1] It was reserved for him to touch the conscience of a city woman who was a sinner, and to bring her from her clamorous and seductive ways to the sweetness of penitential tears, and the rapturous love which forgiveness kindles. It is He, and not the ancient Wisdom, which has turned the current of men's thoughts into juster and kindlier ways on this great question. And thus it is that the great Christian poet represents the archangel correcting the faulty judgment of man.[2] Adam, speaking with the usual virtuous indignation of the stronger sex in contemplation of the soft vision of frail women presented to his eyes, says :—

> "O pity and shame, that they, who to live well
> Entered so fair, should turn aside to tread
> Paths indirect, or in the midway faint!
> But still I see the tenour of man's woe
> Holds on the same, from woman to begin."

The correction is the correction of Christ, though Michael is the speaker :—

> "From man's effeminate slackness it begins,"
> Said the angel, "who should better hold his place,
> By wisdom and superior gifts received."

Our Lord draws no such pictures as these in the

[1] See John viii. 1 *et seq.*

[2] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, xi. 650 etc.

book of Proverbs; they have their value; it is necessary to warn young men against the seductions which the vices of other men have created in woman's form; but He prefers always to go to the root of the matter; He speaks to men themselves; He bids them restrain the wandering eye, and keep pure the fountains of the heart. To that censorious Wisdom which judges without any perception that woman is more sinned against than sinning He would oppose His severe command to be rid of the beam in one's own eye, before making an attempt to remove the mote from another's. It is in this way that He in so many varied fields of thought and action has turned a half truth into a whole truth by going a little deeper, and unveiling the secrets of the heart; and in this way He has enabled us to use the half truth, setting it in its right relation to the whole.[1]

[1] The fuller teaching of the book on the subject of Woman will be found in Lect. XXXI.

X.

WEALTH.

"Treasures of wickedness profit nothing:
But righteousness delivereth from death."—PROV. x. 2.

"O'erweening statesmen have full long relied
On fleets and armies and external wealth;
But from *within* proceeds a Nation's health."
WORDSWORTH.

NO moral system is complete which does not treat with clearness and force the subject of wealth. The material possessions of an individual or of a nation are in a certain sense the pre-requisites of all moral life; for until the human being has food to eat he cannot be virtuous, he cannot even live; until he has clothing he cannot be civilised; and unless he has a moderate assurance of necessaries, and a certain margin of leisure secured from the toil of life, he cannot live well, and there can be no moral development in the full sense of that term. And so with a nation: it must have a sufficient command of the means of subsistence to maintain a considerable number of people who are not engaged in productive labour, before it can make much advance in the noblest qualities of national life, progress in the arts, extension of knowledge, and spiritual cultivation. The production of wealth, therefore, if not strictly speaking a moral question itself, presses closely upon all other moral questions. Wisdom must have some-

thing to say about it, because, without it, Wisdom, in a material world like ours, could not exist.

Wisdom will be called upon to direct the energies which produce wealth, and to determine the feelings with which we are to regard the wealth which is produced.

Moral problems weightier still begin to emerge when the question of Distribution presents itself. Moral considerations lie at the root of this question; and Political Economy, so far as it attempts to deal with it apart from moral considerations, must always be merely a speculative, and not a practical or a fruitful science.

If Production is in a sense the presupposition of all moral and spiritual life, no less certainly correct moral conceptions—may we not even say true spiritual conditions?—are the indispensable means of determining Distribution. For a society in which every individual is striving with all his strength or cunning to procure for himself the largest possible share of the common stock, in which therefore the material possessions gravitate into the hands of the strong and the unscrupulous, while the weak and the honourable are left destitute—such a society, if it ever came into existence, would be a demoralised society. Such a demoralisation is always probable when the means of production have been rapidly and greatly improved, and when the fever of getting has overpowered the sense of righteousness and all the kindlier human feelings. Such a demoralisation is to be averted by securing attention to the abiding moral principles which must govern men's action in the matter of wealth, and by enforcing these principles with such vividness of illustration and such cogency of sanction that they shall be generally accepted and practised.

In our own day this question of the distribution of

wealth stands in the front rank of practical questions. Religious teachers must face it, or else they must forfeit their claim to be the guides and instructors of their generation.

Socialists are grappling with this question not altogether in a religious spirit: they have stepped into a gap which Christians have left empty; they have recognised a great spiritual issue when Christians have seen nothing but a material problem of pounds, shillings, and pence, of supply and demand, of labour and capital. Where Socialism adopts the programme of Revolution, Wisdom cannot give in her adhesion; she knows too well that suffering, impatience, and despair are unsafe, although very pathetic, counsellors; she knows too well that social upheaval does not produce social reconstruction, but a weary entail of fresh upheavals; she has learnt, too, that society is organic, and cannot, like Pelops in the myth, win rejuvenescence by being cut up and cast into the cauldron, but can advance only by a quiet and continuous growth, in which each stage comes naturally and harmoniously out of the stage which preceded. But all Socialism is not revolutionary. And Wisdom cannot withhold her sympathy and her aid where Socialism takes the form of stating, and expounding, and enforcing truer conceptions concerning the distribution of wealth. It is by vigorous and earnest grappling with the moral problem that the way of advance is prepared; every sound lesson therefore in the right way of regarding wealth, and in the use of wealth, is a step in the direction of that social renovation which all earnest men at present desire.

The book of Proverbs presents some very clear and decisive teaching on this question, and it is our task

now to view this teaching, scattered and disconnected though it be, as a whole.

I. The first thing to be noted in the book is its *frank and full recognition that Wealth has its advantages*, and *Poverty has its disadvantages*. There is no quixotic attempt to overlook, as many moral and spiritual systems do, the perfectly obvious facts of life. The extravagance and exaggeration which led St. Francis to choose Poverty as his bride find no more sanction in this Ancient Wisdom than in the sound teaching of our Lord and His Apostles. The rich man's wealth is his strong city,[1] we are told, and as an high wall in his own imagination, while the destruction of the poor is their poverty. The rich man can ransom himself from death if by chance he has fallen into difficulties, though this benefit is to some extent counterbalanced by the reflection that the poor escape the threats of such dangers, as no bandit would care to attack a man with an empty purse and a threadbare cloak.[2] The rich man gains many advantages through his power of making gifts; it brings him before great men,[3] it procures him universal friendship, such as it is,[4] it enables him to pacify the anger of an adversary,[5] for indeed a gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it, whithersoever it turneth it prospereth.[6] Not only does wealth make many friends,[7]

[1] Prov. x. 15; xviii. 11. [3] Prov. xviii. 16. [5] Prov. xxi. 14.
[2] Prov. xiii. 8. [4] Prov. xix. 6; xiv. 20.

[6] Prov. xvii. 8. More literally: "A precious stone is the gift in the eyes of him who gets possession of it, whithersoever he turneth he deals wisely." That is to say, the man who receives the gift, whether a judge or a witness or an opponent, is as it were retained for the giver, and induced to use his best faculties in behalf of his retainer.

[7] Prov. xix. 4: "Wealth addeth many friends, but the poor—his companion separates from him."

it also secures positions of influence and authority, over those who are poorer, enabling a man to sit in Parliament or to gain the governorship of a colony.[1] It gives even the somewhat questionable advantage of being able to treat others with brusqueness and hauteur.[2]

On the other hand, the poor man has to use entreaties.[2] His poverty separates him from his neighbours, and even incurs his neighbours' hatred.[3] Nay, worse than this, his friends go far from him, his very brethren hate him, if he calls after them they quickly get out of his reach;[4] while the necessity of borrowing from wealthier men keeps him in a position of continual bondage.[5] Indeed, nothing can compensate for being without the necessaries of life: "Better is he that is lightly esteemed, and is his own servant, than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread."[6]

Since then Poverty is a legitimate subject of dread, there are urgent exhortations to diligence and thrift, quite in accordance with the excellent apostolic maxim that if a man will not work he shall not eat; while there are forcible statements of the things which tend to poverty, and of the courses which result in comfort and wealth. Thus it is pointed out how slack and listless labour leads to poverty, while industry leads to wealth.[7]

[1] Prov. xxii. [illegible] [2] Prov. xviii. 23. [3] Prov. xiv. 20; xix. 4.

[4] Prov. xix. 7. The sense of the Authorised Version is here retained, but it will be seen in Lecture XII. that there is good reason for treating the third clause of the verse as a mutilated fragment of another proverb: see p. 166.

[5] Prov. xxii. 7.

[6] Prov. xii. 9. This reading is obtained by following the LXX., whose translation ὁ δουλεύων ἑαυτῷ shows that they pointed וְעֹבֵד לוֹ. *Cf.* Eccles. x. 27: "Better is he that laboureth and aboundeth in all things than he that boasteth himself and lacketh bread."

[7] Prov. x. 4.

We are reminded that the obstinate refusal to be corrected is a fruitful source of poverty,[1] while the humble and pious mind is rewarded with riches as well as with honour and life.[2] In the house of the wise man are found treasures as well as all needful supplies.[3] Drunkenness and gluttony lead to poverty, and drowsiness clothes a man with rags.[4] And there is a beautiful injunction to engage in an agricultural life, which is the only perennial source of wealth, the only secure foundation of a people's prosperity. As if we were back in patriarchal times, we are thus admonished in the later proverbs of Solomon[5]:—

"Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks,
And look well to thy herds;
For riches are not for ever;
And doth the crown endure unto all generations?
The hay is carried, and the tender grass showeth itself,
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in.
The lambs are for thy clothing,
And the goats are the price of the field:
And there will be goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household;
And maintenance for thy maidens."

II. But now, making all allowance for the advantages of wealth, we have to notice *some of its serious drawbacks*. To begin with, it is always insecure. If a man places any dependence upon it, it will fail him; only in his imagination is it a sure defence.[6] "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it? it is gone. For riches certainly make themselves wings, like an eagle that flieth toward heaven."[7]

[1] Prov. xiii. 18. [4] Prov. xxiii. 21, Prov. xi. 28.
[2] Prov. xxii. 4. [5] Prov. xxvii. 23-27. [7] Prov. xxiii. 5 (marg.).
[3] Prov. xxi. 20.

But, further, if the wealth has been obtained in any other way than by honest labour it is useless, at any rate for the owner, and indeed worse than useless for him.[1]

As the text says, treasures of wickedness profit nothing. In the revenues of the wicked is trouble.[2] Got in light and fallacious ways, the money dwindles; only when gathered by labour does it really increase.[3] When it is obtained by falsehood—by the tricks and misrepresentations of trade, for example—it may be likened to a vapour driven to and fro—nay, rather to a mephitic vapour, a deadly exhalation, the snares of death.[4] Worst of all is it to obtain wealth by oppression of the poor; one who does so shall as surely come to want as he who gives money to those who do not need it.[5] In fact, our book contains the striking thought that ill-earned wealth is never gathered for the benefit of the possessor, but only for the benefit of the righteous, and must be useless until it gets into hands which will use it benevolently.[6]

And while there are these serious drawbacks to material possessions, we are further called upon to notice that there is wealth of another kind, wealth consisting in moral or spiritual qualities, compared with

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[1] *Cf.* the Turkish proverb: "Of riches lawfully gained the devil takes half, of riches unlawfully gained he takes the whole and the owner too."

[2] Prov. xv. 6, *cf.* xiv. 24, "A crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools, (though they be rich, remains nothing but) folly."

[3] Prov. xiii. 11.

[4] Prov. xxi. 6. It is evident from their translation *ἐπὶ παγίδας θανάτου* that the LXX. read מוֹקְשֵׁי־מָוֶת as in Psalm xviii. 6, and this gives a very graphic and striking sense, while the received text of the Hebrew, מְבַקְשֵׁי־מָוֶת, is hardly intelligible.

Prov. xxii. 16. [5] Prov. xiii. 22; xxviii. 8.

which wealth, as it is usually understood, is quite paltry and unsatisfying. When the intrinsic defects of silver and gold have been frankly stated, this earthy treasure is set, as a whole, in comparison with another kind of treasure, and is observed to become pale and dim. Thus "riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death."[1] Indeed it is only the blessing of the Lord which brings riches without drawbacks.[2] In the house of the righteous is much treasure.[3] Better is a little with righteousness than great treasure without right.[4] In the light of these moral considerations the relative positions of the rich and the poor are reversed; it is better to be an honest poor man than a perverse rich man; the little grain of integrity in the heart and life outweighs all the balance at the bank.[5]

A little wisdom, a little sound understanding, or a little wholesome knowledge is more precious than wealth. How much better is it to get wisdom than gold. Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver.[6] There may be gold and abundance of rubies, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.[7]

Nay, there are some things apparently very trifling

[1] Prov. xi. 4.
[2] Prov. x. 22.
[3] Prov. xv. 6.
[4] Prov. xvi. 8.
[5] Prov. xix. 1. The parallelism in this verse is not so complete as in xxviii. 6. The Peshitto reads, "than he who is perverse in his lips and is rich," but it is better to retain the text and understand: There is a poor man walking in his integrity, and everyone thinks that he is to be commiserated; but he is much better off than the fool with perverse lips, though no one thinks of commiserating this last.
[6] Prov. xvi. 16.
[7] Prov. xx. 15.

which will so depreciate material wealth that if a choice is to be made it is well to let the wealth go and to purchase immunity from these trivial troubles. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.[1] Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith than an house full of feasting with strife.[2] Yes, the good will and affectionate regard of our fellow-men are on the whole far more valuable than a large revenue. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.[3] Indeed, when the relations of the rich and the poor are brought up into God's presence our whole conception of the matter is liable to change; we observe the rich and the poor meet together, and the Lord the maker of them all;[4] we observe that any slur cast on the poor or any oppression of them is practically a reproach against the Maker,[5] whilst any act of pity or tenderness to the needy is in effect a service rendered to God; and more and more we get to feel that notwithstanding the rich man's good opinion of himself he presents rather a sorry spectacle in the presence of the wise, even though the wise may be exceedingly poor.[6]

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[1] Prov. xv. 16, 17. [2] Prov. xvii. 1.

[3] Prov. xxii. 1. This proverb is inscribed in the cupola which lights the Manchester Exchange. It is a good skylight, but apparently too high up for the busy merchants on the floor of the Exchange to see without more effort than is to be expected of them.

[4] Prov. xxii. 2. [5] Prov. xiv. 31; xvii. 5.

[6] Prov. xxviii. 11. Cf. an interesting addition to xvii. 6 in the LXX. —*τοῦ πιστοῦ ὅλος ὁ κόσμος τῶν χρημάτων τοῦ δὲ ἀπίστου οὐδὲ ὀβολός.* The faithful man owns the whole world of possessions, the unfaithful owns not a farthing.

Taking into account therefore the intrinsic insecurity of wealth, and the terrible flaws in the title which may result from questionable ways of obtaining it, and estimating at a right value the other things which are not usually reckoned as wealth,—goodness, piety, wisdom, knowledge, and love,—we can quite understand that enlightened men might be too busy in life to make money, too occupied with grave purposes and engrossed with noble objects of pursuit to admit the perturbations of mammon into their souls.[1] Making all allowance for the unquestionable advantages of being rich, and the serious inconveniences of being poor, we may yet see reasons for not greatly desiring wealth, nor greatly dreading poverty.

III. But now we come to the positive counsels which our Teacher would give on the strength of these considerations about money and its acquisition. And first of all we are solemnly cautioned against the fever of money-getting, the passion to get rich, a passion which has the most demoralising effect on its victims, and is indeed an indication of a more or less perverted character. The good man cannot be possessed by it, and if he could he would soon become bad.[2]

These grave warnings of Wisdom are specially needed at he present time in England and America, when the undisguised and the unrestrained pursuit of riches has become more and more recognised as the legitimate end of life, so that few people feel any shame

[1] It is said of Agassiz that he excused himself from engaging in a profitable lecturing tour on the ground that he had not time to make money.

[2] *Cf.* the saying of Sirach: "Winnow not with every wind and go not into every way, for so doth the sinner that hath a double tongue" (Eccles. v. 9).

in admitting that this is their aim; and the clear unimpassioned statements of the result, which always follows on the unhallowed passion, receive daily confirmation from the occasional revelations of our domestic, our commercial, and our criminal life. He that is greedy of gain, we are told, troubleth his own house.[1] An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.[2] A faithful man shall abound with blessings, but he that maketh haste to be rich (and consequently cannot by any possibility be faithful) shall not be unpunished.[3] He that hath an evil eye hasteth after riches, and knoweth not that want shall come upon him.[4] "Weary not thyself," therefore, it is said, "to be rich;" which, though it may be the dictate of thine own wisdom,[5] is really unmixed folly, burdened with a load of calamity for the unfortunate seeker, for his house, and for all those who are in any way dependent upon him.

Again, while we are cautioned not to aim constantly at the increase of our possessions, we are counselled to exercise a generous liberality in the disposal of such things as are ours. Curiously enough, niggardliness in giving is associated with slothfulness in labour, while it is implied that the wish to help others is a constant motive for due diligence in the business of life. "There is that coveteth greedily all the day long, but the righteous giveth and withholdeth not."[6] The law of nature,—the law of life,—is to give out and not merely to receive, and in fulfilling that law we receive unexpected blessings: "There is that scattereth and increaseth yet

[1] Prov. xv. 27.
[2] Prov. xx. 21.
[3] Prov. xxviii. 20.
[4] Prov. xxviii. 22.
[5] Prov. xxiii. 4.
[6] Prov. xxi. 26.

more, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth only to want. The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."[1] "He that giveth to the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse."[2] "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and his good deed will He pay him again."[3] "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."[4]

Such a wholesome shunning of the thirst for wealth, and such a generous spirit in aiding others, naturally suggest to the wise man a daily prayer, a request that he may avoid the dangerous extremes, and walk in the happy mean of worldly possessions: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and use profanely the name of my God."[5] It is a request not easy to make with perfect sincerity; there are not many who, like Emerson's grandfather, venture to pray that neither they nor their descendants may ever be rich; while there have been not a few who in a "show of wisdom in will-worship and humility and severity to the body" have sought for an unnecessary and an unwholesome poverty. But it is a wise request; it finds an echo in the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples, and constantly appears inwoven in the apostolic teaching. And if the individual is to desire such things for himself, he must naturally desire that such may be the lot of his fellow-creatures, and he

[1] Prov. xi. 24, 25.
[2] Prov. xxviii. 27.
[3] Prov. xix. 17.
[4] Prov. xxii. 9.
[5] Prov xxx. 8, 9.

must make it the aim of his efforts after social reform to indefinitely increase the number of those who occupy this happy middle position, and have neither riches nor poverty.

And now we have followed the lines of teaching contained in this book on the subject of wealth, and it is impossible to miss the wisdom, the moderation, the inspiration of such counsels. We cannot fail to see that if these principles were recognised universally, and very generally practised; if they were ingrained in the constitution of our children, so as to become the instinctive motives and guides of action; the serious social troubles which arise from the unsatisfactory distribution of wealth would rapidly disappear. Happy would that society be in which all men were aiming, not at riches, but merely at a modest competency, dreading the one extreme as much as the other; in which the production of wealth were constantly moderated and controlled by the conviction that wealth gotten by vanity is as the snares of death; in which all who had become the owners of wealth were ready to give and glad to distribute, counting a wise benevolence, which in giving to the needy really lends to the Lord, the best investment in the world.

If these neglected principles are hitherto very faintly recognised, we must recollect that they have never been seriously preached. Although they were theoretically taught, and practically lived out, in the words and the life of Jesus Christ, they have never been fully incorporated into Christianity. The mediæval Church fell into the perilous doctrines of the Ebionites, and glorified poverty in theory while in practice it became an engine of unparalleled rapacity. Protestantism has

generally been too much occupied with the great principle of Justification by Faith to pay much attention to such a writing as the Epistle of St. James, which Luther described as "a letter of straw"; and thus, while we all believe that we are saved by faith in Christ Jesus, it seldom occurs to us that such a faith must include the most exact and literal obedience to His teachings. Christian men unblushingly serve Mammon, and yet hope that they are serving God too, because they believe on Him whom God sent—though He whom God sent expressly declared that the two services could not be combined. Christian men make it the effort of a lifetime to become rich, although Christ declared that it was easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven; and when they hear that Christ required an intending follower to sell all that he had and give to the poor, they explain it away, and maintain that He does not require such a sacrifice from them, but simply asks them to believe in the Atonement.

In this way Christians have made their religion incredible, and even ridiculous, to many of the most earnest spirits of our time. When Christ is made unto them Wisdom as well as Redemption, they will see that the principles of Wisdom which concern wealth are obligatory upon them, just because they profess to believe in Christ.

XI.

GOODNESS

"The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them."—Prov. xi. 6.
"An unjust man is the abomination of the righteous, and he who goes right in his way is the abomination of the wicked."—Prov. xxix. 27.

THE book of Proverbs abounds with sayings which have the sound of truisms, sayings which repeat, with innumerable variations and shades of colouring, that wickedness is an evil, hateful to God and to men, and that righteousness is a blessing not only to the righteous themselves, but to all with whom they are connected. We are disposed to say, Surely no reasonable person can question such an obvious truth; but on reflection we remember that the truth was not perceived by the great religions of antiquity, is not recognised now by the vast majority of the human race, and even where it is theoretically admitted without question is too frequently forgotten in the hurry and the pressure of practical life. There is good reason therefore why the truism, as we are inclined to call it, should be thrown into the form of maxims which will find a hold in the memory, and readily occur to the mind on occasions of trial. And as we pass in review what Proverbial Religion has to say upon the subject, we shall perhaps be surprised to find how imperfectly we

have apprehended the supreme importance of goodness, and how insidiously teachings, which were originally meant to enforce it, have usurped its place and treated it with contumely. It will begin to dawn upon us that the truth is a truism, not because it is carried out in practice, but only because no one has the hardihood to question it; and perhaps we shall receive some impulse towards transforming the conviction which we cannot dispute into a mode of conduct which we cannot decline.

To begin with, our book is most unflinching in its assertions that, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, *wickedness is a mistake*, a source of perpetual weakness and insecurity, always in the long run producing ruin and death; while *righteousness is in itself a perpetual blessing*, and is weighted with beautiful and unexpected fruits. The very reiteration becomes most impressive.

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.[1] The righteous shall never be removed, but the wicked shall not dwell in the land.[2] The house of the wicked shall be overthrown, but the tent of the upright shall flourish.[3] The wicked earneth deceitful wages, but he that soweth righteousness hath a sure reward.[4] A man shall not be established by wickedness, while the root of the righteous shall never be moved.[5] The wicked really falls by his own wickedness, and is swept away by his own violence.[6] He sows iniquity and reaps

[1] Prov. x. 28. [2] Prov. x. 30.

[3] Prov. xiv. 11. Cf. Prov. xii. 7: "Overthrow the wicked; and they are not (*i.e.*, there is no rising again for them), but the house of the righteous shall stand."

[4] Prov. xi. 18. [5] Prov. xiii. 3. [6] Prov. xi. 5, 6; xxi. 7.

calamity.[1] His crooked way, his malignant thoughts, the hatred against his neighbour, the guile in his heart, and the flood of evil things which comes out of his lips, have one issue—destruction.[2] When he comes to die, his expectation perishes, all the hope of iniquity ends in disappointment.[3] His lamp goes out not to be relit.[4] Meanwhile, the light of the righteous man rejoices, because he attains unto life as surely as the wicked works towards death.[5]

It is true that the appearance of things is different. Hand joins in hand to promote evil.[6] Men follow out what seems right in their own hearts, evil as they are.[7] Success seems to attend them, and one is tempted to envy the sinners, and to fret at their ways.[8] But the envy is misplaced; the evil man does not go unpunished; the wicked are overthrown and are not.[9] The way which seemed right in a man's eyes proves to be the way of death.[10] A righteous man falleth seven times and riseth up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity,[11] and the righteous are obliged to look upon their fall.[12]

On the other hand, goodness is its own continual reward. While treacherous men are destroyed by their perverseness, the upright are guided by their own integrity.[13] While the sinner is overthrown by his wickedness, righteousness guardeth him that is upright

[1] Prov. xxii. 8.
[2] Prov. xxi. 7, 8, 10, 15; xxvi. 24, 26; xv. 28.
[3] Prov. xi. 7.
[4] Prov. xiii. 9; xxiv. 20.
[5] Prov. xi. 19.
[6] Prov. xi. 21.
[7] Prov. xiv. 12; xvi. 5, 25 xxi. 2
[8] Prov. xxiii. 17, 18; xxiv. 1, 19.
[9] Prov. xii. 7.
[10] Prov. xiv. 12; xvi. 25.
[11] Prov. xxiv. 15, 16.
[12] Prov. xxix. 16.
[13] Prov. xi. 3.

in the way.[1] If the righteous gets into trouble he is delivered, while the wicked falls into his place:[2] there is a kind of substitution; a ransom is paid to enable the righteous to escape, and the ransom is the person of the wicked.[3] Not only does the righteous come out of trouble,[4] but, strictly speaking, no mischief really happens to him; it is only the wicked that is filled with evil.[5] The righteous eats to the satisfying of his own soul, but the belly of the wicked shall want.[6] The good man walks on a highway and so preserves his soul.[7] Mercy and truth shine upon him because he devises good.[8] He only followed after righteousness and mercy, but he found life, righteousness, and honour.[9] His heart is flooded with joy, he actually sings as he journeys on.[10] He seems like a tree in the green leaf, a tree of life, the fruits of which cannot fail to be attractive; so that he unconsciously wins favour.[11] The fruit does not fail, because the root is alive.[12] And if in actual life this blessedness of the good man does not appear, if by reason of the evil in the world the righteous seem to be punished, and the noble to be

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[1] Prov. xiii. 6. Cf. Prov. xiv. 14: "The backslider in heart shall be sated from his own ways, and the good man from himself." Though probably we ought to read, with Nowack, מִמַּעֲלָלָיו, which would give a completer parallelism: "The backslider shall be sated from his own ways, and the good man from his own doings."

[2] Prov. xi. 8. Cf. Prov. xxviii. 18.

[3] Prov. xxi. 18.

[4] Prov. xii. 13.

[5] Prov. xii. 21.

[6] Prov. xiii. 25.

[7] Prov. xvi. 17; xix. 16.

[8] Prov. xiv. 22.

[9] Prov. xxi. 21.

[10] Prov. xxi. 15; xxix. 6. Unless, with Delitzsch, we are to read בְּפָשַׁע for בְּפֶשַׁע, and יָרוּץ for יָרוֹן, which would give: "In the steps of a bad man lie snares, but the righteous runs and rejoices."

[11] Prov. xi. 27, 30.

[12] Prov. xii. 12.

smitten,[1] that only creates a conviction that the fruit will grow in another life; for when we have closely observed the inseparable connection between goodness and blessedness, we cannot avoid the conviction that "the righteous hath hope in his death."[2] Yes, practical goodness is the source of perpetual blessing, and it cannot be altogether hidden. Even a child maketh himself known by his doings, whether his work be pure and right.[3] To the good we must assign the supremacy; the evil must bow before them and wait at their gates.[4] And it is easy to understand why it appears so incongruous—so abnormal, like a troubled fountain and a corrupted spring, when the righteous give way to the wicked.[5]

Nor is the blessing of goodness at all limited to the good man himself. It falls on his children too. A just man that walketh in his integrity, blessed are his children after him.[6] It reaches even to the third generation. A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children.[7] The righteous is a guide to his neighbour also.[8] He is a joy to his sovereign; he that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.[9] His character and his well-being are a matter of public, even of national

[1] Prov. xvii. 26: "To punish the righteous is not good, nor to smite the noble for their uprightness."

[2] Prov. xiv. 32.

[3] Prov. xx. 11.

[4] Prov. xiv. 19.

[5] Prov. xxv. 26.

[6] Prov. xiv. 26: "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge." So Prov. xx. 7: "A just man that walketh in his integrity: blessed are his children after him."

[7] Prov. xiii. 22.

[8] Prov. xii. 26.

[9] Prov. xxii. 11. Cf. Prov. xvi. 13.

concern, for there is something winning in him; he acts as a saving influence upon those who are around him.[1] Therefore, when the righteous increase the people rejoice,[2] when they triumph there is great glory.[3] When it goeth well with the righteous the city rejoiceth, just as when the wicked perish there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, just as it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.[4] Yes, righteousness exalteth a nation, while sin is a reproach to the whole people.[5]

It is the grand public interest to see the wicked perish in order that the righteous may increase:[6] for the way of the wicked causes other people to err.[7] His lips are like a scorching fire;[8] his presence brings a general atmosphere of contempt, ignominy, and shame.[9] When the wicked rise men hide themselves,[10] when they bear rule the people sigh.[11] Well may the national feeling be severe on all those who encourage the wicked in any way. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous, peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him; but to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.[12] It is a sure sign that one is forsaking the law when one ceases to contend with the wicked and begins to praise them.[13]

Blessing to himself, blessing to his children, his neighbours, his country, is the beautiful reward of the good man; ruin to himself, a spreading contagion of evil to others, and general execration, is the lot of

[1] Prov. xi. 31.
[2] Prov. xxix. 2.
[3] Prov. xxviii. 12.
[4] Prov. xi. 10, 11.
[5] Prov. xiv. 34.
[6] Prov. xxviii. 28.
[7] Prov. xii. 26.
[8] Prov. xvi. 27.
[9] Prov. xviii. 3.
[10] Prov. xxviii. 28.
[11] Prov. xxix. 2.
[12] Prov. xxiv. 24, 25.
[13] Prov. xxviii. 4.

the wicked. Well may the former be bold as a lion, and well may the latter flee when no man pursues, for conscience makes cowards of us all.[1]

But at present we have not touched on the chief blessedness of the good, and the chief curse of the evil, on that which is really the spring and fountain-head of all. It is the great fact that *God is with the righteous and against the wicked*, that He judges men according to their integrity or perverseness, and accepts them or rejects them simply upon that principle. By looking at this lofty truth we get all our conceptions on the subject cleared. The perverse *in heart* are an abomination to the Lord; such as are perfect in their way are His delight.[2] A good man shall obtain favour of the Lord, but a man of wicked devices will He condemn.[3] Evil devices are an abomination to the Lord,[4] and so is the wicked, but He loveth the righteous.[5] To justify the wicked or to condemn the righteous is equally abominable to Him.[6] He considers the house of the wicked, how the wicked are overthrown to their ruin.[7] He overthrows the words of the treacherous man, while His eyes preserve him that hath knowledge.[8] He weighs the heart and keeps the soul and renders to every man according to his work.[9] Thus His way is a stronghold to the upright, but a destruction to the workers of iniquity.[10] He does not regard prayer so much as righteousness; he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomina-

[1] Prov. xxviii. 1. [2] Prov. xii. 2. [3] Prov. xv. 9.
[4] Prov. xi. 20. [5] Prov. xv. 26. [6] Prov. xvii. 15, 26; xviii. 5.
[7] Prov. xxi. 12, where "one that is righteous" seems to mean God Himself; see the margin of R.V.
[8] Prov. xxii. 12. [9] Prov. xxiv. 12. [10] Prov. x. 29.

tion.[1] Sacrifice goes for nothing in His sight if the life is not holy. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.[2] The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?[3] Yes, it is an abomination to the Lord, just as the prayer of the upright is His delight. The Lord is far from the wicked, but He heareth the prayer of the righteous.[4] When the foolish sinner offers a sin-offering instead of relinquishing his sin, the very offering mocks him, for it is only the righteous who find favour with the Lord.[5]

It is this solemn truth, the truth of God's own way of regarding goodness and wickedness, which makes earnestness on the subject essential. If goodness were only pleasing to man, if sin were only an offence against creatures like ourselves, ordinary prudence would require us to be good and to avoid evil, but higher sanction would be wanting. When, however, the matter is taken up into the Divine presence, and we begin to understand that the Supreme Ruler of all things loves righteousness and hates iniquity, visits the one with favour and the other with reprobation, quite a new sanction is introduced. The wicked man, who makes light of evil, to whom it is as a sport, appears to be nothing short of an absolute fool.[6] In God's presence it is not difficult to perceive that goodness is wisdom, the only wisdom, the perfect wisdom.

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[1] Prov. xxviii. 9.

[2] Prov. xxi. 3.

[3] Prov. xxi. 27.

[4] Prov. xv. 8, 29.

[5] Prov. xiv. 9. This seems to be the meaning of this difficult verse, which should be translated: The sin-offering mocks fools, but among the righteous is favour.

[6] Prov. x. 23.

But now it may occur to some of us that it is surely nothing very wonderful to lay this stress upon the close connection between goodness and God-pleasing. Is it not, we are inclined to say, the most obvious and unquestioned of facts that God requires goodness at our hands, and is angry with the wicked every day? It is not very wonderful to us, because Revelation has made it familiar, but none the less it is a truth of Revelation, and if we were to ask in what the Inspiration of this book consists, no simpler and truer answer could be given than that it teaches, as we have just seen, the alliance of God with righteousness and the abhorrence in which He holds wickedness.

Yes, a truism, but it was a discovery which the world was very slow to make, and it is still a principle on which the world is very unwilling to act.

The main characteristic of all heathen religions is that their gods do not demand righteousness, but certain outward and formal observances; sacrifices must be offered to them, their vindictive temper must be propitiated, their anger averted; if the dues of the gods are paid, the stipulated quantity of corn and wine and oil, the tithes, the firstfruits, the animals for the altar, the tribute for the temple, then the worshipper who has thus discharged his obligations may feel himself free to follow out his own tastes and inclinations. In the Roman religion, for example, every dealing with the gods was a strictly legal contract; the Roman general agreed with Jupiter or with Mars that if the battle should be won a temple should be built. It was not necessary that the cause should be right, or that the general should be good; the sacrifice of the wicked, though offered with an evil intent, was as valid as the

sacrifice of the good. In either case the same amount of marble and stone, of silver and gold, would come to the god.

In the Eastern religions not only were goodness and righteousness dissociated from the idea of the gods, but evil of the grossest kinds was definitely associated with them. The Phœnician deities, like those of the Hindoos, were actually worshipped with rites of murder and lust. Every vice had its patron god or goddess, and it was forgotten by priest and people that goodness could be the way of pleasing God, or moral evil a cause of offence to Him.

Even in Israel, where the teaching of Revelation was current in the proverbs of the people, the practice generally followed the heathen conceptions. All the burning protests of the inspired prophets could not avail to convince the Israelite that what God required was not sacrifice and offering, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him. Again and again we find that the high places were frequented and the ritual supported by men who were sensual, unjust, and cruel. The Sabbath Day was kept, the feasts were duly observed, the priests were handsomely maintained, and there, it was supposed, the legitimate claims of Jehovah ceased. What more could He desire?

This is surely the most impressive proof that the Truth which is under consideration is far from being obvious. Israel himself, the chosen channel for communicating this truth to the world, was so slow to understand and to grasp it, that his religious observances were constantly degenerating into lifeless ceremonies devoid of all moral significance, and his religious

teachers were mainly occupied in denouncing his conduct as wholly inconsistent with the truth.

So far from treating the truth as a truism, our Lord in all His teaching laboured to bring it out in greater clearness, and to set it in the forefront of His message to men. He made it the very keynote of the Gospel that not every one who says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of His Father in heaven. He painted with exquisite simplicity and clearness the right life, the conduct which God requires of us, and then likened every one who practised this life to a man who builds his house on a rock, and every one who does not practise it to a man who builds his house on the sand. He declared, in the spirit of all that we have just read from the book of Proverbs, that teachers were to be judged by their fruits, and that God would estimate our lives not by what we professed to do, but by what we did; and He took up the very language of the book in declaring that every man should be judged according to his works.[1] In every word He spoke He made it plain that goodness is what God loves, and that wickedness is what He judges and destroys. In the same way every one of the Apostles insists on this truth with a new earnestness. St. John more especially reiterates it, in words which sound even more like a truism than the sayings of this book: "He that doeth righteousness is righteous even as He is righteous;" and, "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him."[2]

The Gospel itself is accompanied by a new and more

[1] Matt. xvi. 27.

[2] 1 John iii. 7, 10; ii. 29.

earnest assertion of this cardinal truth, that God loves goodness, and that He judges men according to their works. And even now, after many centuries of Christian faith, and notwithstanding all the teachings of the Bible and the witness of the Spirit, it is very difficult for many of us to understand that religion is goodness, and religion without goodness is impiety of the worst kind. It is supposed by some, in face of all the accumulated truth and wisdom of the ages which have passed since this book was written, that God's last and highest message is a dispensation from practical righteousness —that the Gospel of Grace means God's willingness to accept men because they believe, apart from the actual goodness to which all faith is calculated to lead; as if the Gospel were an announcement that God had entirely changed His nature, and that all the best and noblest teachings of His Spirit in the past were set aside by His final revelation. Behind some figment or other, some perverted notion of imputed righteousness, men try to hide their guilty countenance, and to persuade themselves that now, in virtue of the Cross, they can see God without holiness, without purity of heart. Heaven has been treated as a place where men can enter who work abomination and make a lie; and in order to secure a full acceptance for our dogma we try to depreciate goodness as if it were a thing of little worth, and even come to look with some suspicion on those who are only good—only moral, I think we call it—and do not hold our own views of speculative truth. Meanwhile religious teachers "tell the wicked they are righteous," and earn the curse of the nation, because they thereby enable men to be hard and cruel and unjust and selfish and proud and contemptuous, and

yet to esteem themselves as justified by faith. Others "justify the wicked," accepting a verbal profession in place of a virtuous practice; and that, as we have seen, is abominable to the Lord.

Justification by faith loses all its meaning and all its value unless it is fully admitted that *to be just* is the great end and aim of religion. Salvation becomes a delusion unless it is perceived that it means righteousness. Heaven, and the saints' everlasting rest, become worthless and misleading ideas unless we recognise that it is the abode of goodness, and that saints are not, as we sometimes seem to imply, bad people regarded as holy by a legal fiction, but people who are made good and are actually holy.

Strong as the language of our book is upon the subject, it is not possible to bring out in mere proverbial sayings the eternal necessity of this great truth. Goodness and blessedness are actually identical, the reverse and the obverse sides of the same coin. If a man is made good he is made blessed; but if he is made blessed to all appearance, and not good, the blessedness proves to be an illusion. It could not possibly avail to be justified by faith, unless we were made just by faith; a sore body is not healed by covering it up, a dead man is not quickened by a smiling mask. There have been many people who counted themselves the elect, and made no question that they were saved, though they remained all the time inwardly wicked; they were miserable, sour, discontented, censorious, a burden to themselves, an eyesore to others; they were persuaded that they would be happy in heaven, and they supposed that their constant wretchedness was due to their being pilgrims in a strange land;

but the fact was they would be more wretched still in heaven, for nowhere is evil such a curse as in a place where good prevails; their misery arose from their own wicked hearts, and in the next world, their hearts still being wicked, their misery must continue and increase.

May God grant us a clear vision in this matter, that we may see the due relation of things! Goodness is the principal thing—for it faith itself and all religion exists. God is goodness—man is evil; what God means by saving us is to make us good like Himself. That we must be saved by faith means that we must be made good by faith, not that we must take faith in place of goodness. That righteousness is imputed to us by the goodness of God means that the goodness of Christ is reckoned as ours for the purpose of making us good, not in order to spare us the necessity of being good. And in this way, and this only, we must estimate one another. What a man believes in his heart we can never fully know; but whether he is good or not is a matter plain as the day. It is easy to bandy words of reproach, to call men unbelievers, sceptics, atheists; but there is only one wise way of speaking and thinking. If we see goodness, let us thank God, for there, be sure, His Spirit is;[1] if we see the lovely graces which shine in our Lord Jesus Christ gleaming, however fitfully, in our fellow-men, let us recognise Christ there. And where we see wickedness, let no consideration of outward Christian profession or orthodoxy of belief restrain us from fully recognising that it is evil, or from courageously contending against it.

[1] "If ye know that He is righteous," says St. John, "ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him" (1 John ii. 29).

XII.

THE TONGUE.

"A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his MOUTH: and the doings of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him."—PROV. xii. 14.

"In the transgression of the LIPS is a snare to an evil man: but the righteous shall come out of trouble."—PROV. xii. 13.

"A fool's vexation is PRESENTLY KNOWN: but a prudent man concealeth shame."—PROV. xii. 16.

"He that uttereth truth SHOWETH FORTH righteousness, but a false witness deceit."—PROV. xii. 17.

"The LIP of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying TONGUE is but for a moment."—PROV. xii. 19.

"Lying LIPS are an abomination unto the Lord: but they that deal truly are His delight."—PROV. xii. 22.

"There is that SPEAKETH rashly like the piercings of a sword: but the TONGUE of the wise is health."—PROV. xii. 18.

"A prudent man CONCEALETH knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness."—PROV. xii. 23.

"The WORDS of the wicked are a lying in wait for blood: but the MOUTH of the upright shall deliver them."—PROV. xii. 6.

"Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop; but a good WORD maketh it glad."—PROV. xii. 25.

THERE is nothing which seems more insubstantial than speech, a mere vibration in the atmosphere which touches the nerves of hearing and then dies away. There is no organ which seems smaller and less considerable than the tongue; a little member which is not even seen, and, physically speaking, soft

and weak. But the word which issues out of the lips is the greatest power in human life. That "soft tongue breaketh the bone."[1] Words will change the currents of life: look for instance at a great orator addressing his audience; how miraculous must it seem to a deaf man watching the speaker that the quiet opening of a mouth should be able to produce such powerful effects upon the faces, the movements, the conduct of the listeners!

We are coming to consider the importance of this diminutive organ, the ill uses and the good uses to which it may be turned, and the consequent necessity of fitly directly and restraining it.

On the use of the tongue depend the issues of a man's own life. It may be regarded as a tree which bears fruits of different kinds, and such fruits as his tongue bears a man must eat. If his words have been good, then he shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth.[2] "A man's belly shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth, with the increase of his lips shall he be satisfied."[3] The fruits which grow on this tongue-tree are death and life—the tongue produces them—and he that loves the tree shall according to his love eat the one fruit or the other; if he loves death-bearing speech he shall eat death; if he loves life-bearing speech he shall eat life.[4] So deadly may be the fruit of the tongue that the mouth of the fool is regarded as a present destruction.[5] So wholesome may be the fruit of the tongue that the tongue of the wise may be actually denominated health.[6]

In the case of the fool it is always very obvious how

[1] Prov. xxv. 15.
[2] Prov. xiii. 2.
[3] Prov. xviii. 20.
[4] Prov. xviii. 21.
[5] Prov. x. 14.
[6] Prov. xii. 18.

powerfully the tongue affects the condition of the speaker. His lips are always coming into strife, and his mouth is always calling for stripes. It is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.[1] In the transgression of the lips always lies the snare for the evil man: ultimately all men are in effect condemned out of their own mouths.[2] The tongue proves to be a rod for the back of the proud and foolish owner of it, while the good man's tongue is a constant life-preserver.[3] As an old proverb says, a fool's tongue is always long enough to cut his own throat. On the other hand, where the tongue is wisely used it always brings back joy to the speaker in the end.[4] Thus whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles,[5] but the man who does not take the pains to hear, but gives his testimony falsely, shall perish.[6] While the use of the tongue thus recoils on the speaker for good or for evil, it has a wide influence also on others. "He that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief,"[7] but when speech is good, and such as it ought to be, "the words of a man's mouth are like deep waters, a gushing brook, a well of wisdom."[8]

Thus it is of vast and obvious importance how we use our tongue. If our speech is gracious we shall win the friendship of the king,[9] and it is a pleasant thing if we "keep the words of the wise within us and if they be established together upon our lips."[10] It is better for us to be poor than perverse or untruthful in our speech.[11] Our teacher, especially our Divine Lord,

[1] Prov. xviii. 6, 7.
[2] Prov. xii. 13.
[3] Prov. xiv. 3.
[4] Prov. xv. 23.
[5] Prov. xxi. 23.
[6] Prov. xxi. 28.
[7] Prov. xvii. 20.
[8] Prov. xviii. 4.
[9] Prov. xxii. 11.
[10] Prov. xxii. 18.
[11] Prov. xix. 1, 22.

will rejoice inwardly and deeply "when our lips speak right things."[1]

We are now cautioned against some of the evil purposes to which the tongue may be turned, and as all the heads of evil are passed in review we realize why St. James spoke of the tongue as "the world of iniquity" (iii. 6); and how profound was our Lord's teaching that out of the mouth proceed the things which defile a man (Matt. xv. 18).

First of all, the tongue is a fruitful source of *Quarrelling* and discord. A fool cannot hide his vexation, but must immediately blurt it out with the tongue.[2] When he is angry he must utter it all at once,[3] though a wise man would keep it back and still it, so concealing shame. No one is more certain to come to grief than "he who provokes with words."[4] These irritating taunts and threats are like coals to hot embers, and wood to fire;[5] in their absence the contention would quickly die out. It is therefore the wise counsel of Agur to one who has done foolishly in exalting himself, or has even entertained for a moment the arrogant or

[1] Prov. xxiii. 16. [2] Prov. xii. 16. [3] Prov. xxix. 11.

[4] Prov. xix. 7. All the Proverbs in this selection are in the form of a distich. This affords a fair presumption that this verse with its three clauses is mutilated; and the presumption is confirmed by the fact that the third clause adds nothing of value, even if it be intelligible at all, to the sense. There is good reason, therefore, for believing that this third clause is the half of a distich which has not been preserved in its integrity; all the more because the LXX. have a complete proverb which runs thus: *ὁ πολλὰ κακοποιῶν τελεσιουργεῖ κακίαν, ὃς δὲ ἐρεθίζει λόγους οὐ σωθήσεται.* "He that does much evil is a craftsman of iniquity, and he that uses provoking words shall not escape." Perhaps in the Hebrew text which was before the Greek translators מְגַדֵּף appeared instead of מְרַדֵּף, and לֹא חָיָה instead of לֹא־הָיְתָה.

[5] Prov. xxvi. 21.

quarrelsome thought, "Hand on thy mouth!" for speech under such circumstances produces strife as surely as churning produces butter from milk, or a blow on the nose blood.[1] Rash, inconsiderate, angry words are like the piercings of a sword.[2] If only our wrathful spirit made us immediately dumb, anger would never go far, it would die out as a conflagration dies when there is no wind to fan the flames.

But again, the tongue is the instrument of *Lying;* one of its worst disservices to man is that when it is well balanced, so that it easily wags, it often betrays him into untruths which his heart never contemplated nor even approved. It is the tongue which by false witness so often condemns the innocent.[3] A worthless witness mocketh at judgment; and the mouth of the wicked swalloweth iniquity.[4] And though such a witness shall not in the long run go unpunished, nor shall the liar escape,[5] yet, as experience shows, he may have brought ruin or calamity on others before vengeance falls upon him. The false witness shall perish,[6] but often not before he has like a mace or a hammer bruised and like a sword or a sharp arrow pierced his unfortunate neighbour.[7] It is the tongue which glozes over the purposes of hate, and lulls the victim into a false security; the fervent lips and the wicked heart are like a silver lining spread over an earthen vessel to make it look like silver; the hatred is cunningly concealed, the seven abominations in the heart are hidden; the pit which is being dug and the stone which is to overwhelm the innocent are kept secret by the facile talk

[1] Prov. xxx. 32, 33. Prov. xii. 18. Prov. xii. 17.
[4] Prov. xix. 28.
[5] Prov. xix. 5, rep. ver. 9.
[6] Prov. xxi. 28.
[7] Prov. xxv. 18.

and flatteries of the tongue; the more the tongue lies in its guileful machinations the more the heart hates the victims of its spite.[1] A righteous man hates lying, but the wicked, by his lies, brings disgrace and shame.[2] The lie often appears to prosper for a moment,[3] but happily it is an abomination to the Lord,[4] and in His righteous ordering of events he makes the falsehood which was as bread, and sweet to the lips, into gravel which breaks the teeth in the mouth.[5] The curse which is causeless is frustrated, and so also is the empty lie; it wanders without rest, without limit, like a sparrow or a swallow.[6]

Closely allied to lying is *Flattery;* and to this vile use the tongue is often put. Flattery is always a mistake. It does not attain its end in winning the favour of the flattered; for in the long run "he that rebuketh a man shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue."[7] If it is believed, as often unfortunately it is, it proves to be a net spread in the path, which may trip up, and may even capture and destroy, the unwary walker.[8]

Another evil use of the tongue is for *Whispering and tale-bearing.* "He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets"—he is not to be trusted, it is better to have nothing to do with him. Disclosing the secret of another is a sure way of incurring reproach and lasting infamy. Such a habit is a fruitful source of rage and indignation, it brings black wrath to the

[1] Prov. xxvi. 23-28.
[2] Prov. xiii. 5.
[3] Prov. xii. 19.
[4] Prov. xii. 22.
[5] Prov. xx. 17.
[6] Prov. xxvi. 2.
[7] Prov. xxviii. 23.
[8] Prov. xxix. 5.

countenance of him whose secret has been published, just as a north wind spreads the rain clouds over the sky.[1] The temptation to tattling is great; the business of a gossip brings an immediate reward; for the corrupt heart of man delights in scandal as an epicure in tit-bits: "The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels which go down into the chamber of the belly."[2] But what mischief they do! They separate bosom friends, sowing suspicion and distrust.[3] Where there is already a little misunderstanding, the whisperer supplies wood to the fire and keeps it burning; apart from him it would soon die out. But if he thinks there is any prospect of a reconciliation he will be constantly harping on the matter; one who seeks love would try to hide the transgression, but the scandal-monger is a foe to love and the unfailing author of enmity.[5]

But there is *Mischief*, more deliberate and more malignant still, which the tongue is employed to plot, to plan and to execute. "With his mouth the godless man destroyeth his neighbour."[6] "The words of the wicked are a lying in wait for blood."[7] "The mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things,"[8] blasphemies, obscenities, curses, imprecations. "A froward man scattereth abroad strife."[9] He deceives, and in bitter raillery declares that he was only jesting; he is like

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[1] Prov. xi. 13 and xx. 19; xxv. 2, 23. *Cf.* "Whoso discovereth secrets loseth his credit and shall never find friend to his mind" (Eccles. xxvii. 16).

[2] Prov. xviii. 8, rep. xxvi. 22.

[3] Prov. xvi. 28.

[4] Prov. xxvi. 20.

[5] Prov. xvii. 9.

[6] Prov. xi. 9.

[7] Prov. xii. 6.

[8] Prov. xv. 28.

[9] Prov. xvi. 28.

a madman casting firebrands, arrows, and death.[1] We know what it is to hear a man pouring out foul, abusive, and impious language, until the very atmosphere seems enflamed with firebrands, and arrows fly hither and thither through the horrified air. We know, too, what it is to hear the smooth and well-turned speech of the hypocrite and the impostor, which seems to oppress the heart with a sense of decomposition; righteousness, truth, and joy seem to wither away, and in the choking suffocation of deceit and fraud life itself seems as if it must expire.

It is a relief to turn from those worst uses of the tongue to the more pardonable vices of *Rashness* and *Inopportuneness* of speech. Yet these too are evil enough in their way. To pass a judgment before we are in possession of the facts, and before we have taken the pains to carefully investigate and consider them, is a sign of folly and a source of shame.[2] So impressed is our teacher with the danger of ill-considered speech that he says, "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him."[3] And even where the utterance of the tongue is in itself good it may be rendered evil by its untimeliness; religious talk itself may be so introduced as to hinder the cause of religion; pearls may be cast before swine: "Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."[4] There must be some preparation of spirit before we can wisely introduce Divine and heavenly things, and circumstances must not be chosen which will tend to make the Divine things seem mean

[1] Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.
[2] Prov. xviii. 13.
[3] Prov. xxix. 20.
[4] Prov. xxiii. 9.

and contemptible. It may be good to rebuke an evildoer, or to admonish a friend; but if the opportunity is not fitting, we may make the evildoer more evil,—we may alienate our friend without improving him.

Considering then what mischief may be done with the tongue, it is not to be wondered at that we are cautioned against *excessive speech.* "In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression, but he that refraineth his lips doeth wisely."[1] "He that guardeth his mouth keepeth his life; who opens wide his lips gets destruction, and a fool spreadeth out folly."[2] "In all labour is profit, the talk of the lips tends only to poverty."[3] "Wisdom rests in the heart of the understanding, but even in the inward part of fools all is blabbed."[4] "In the fool are no lips of knowledge" because he is always talking.[5] "The tongue of the wise uttereth knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools poureth out folly."[6] "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may reveal itself."[7] One who is always pouring out talk is sure to be pouring out folly. The wise man, feeling that all his words must be tested and weighed, is not able to talk very much. When your money is all in copper, you may afford to throw it about, but when it is all in gold

[1] Prov. x. 19. [2] Prov. xiii. 3, 16. [3] Prov. xiv. 23. [4] Prov. xiv. 33.

[5] Prov. xiv. 7. There is a quaint and pertinent passage in Lyly's Euphues:—"We may see the cunning and curious work of Nature, which hath barred and hedged nothing in so strongly as the tongue, with two rowes of teeth, and therewith two lips, besides she hath placed it farre from the heart, that it should not utter that which the heart had conceived; this also should cause us to be silent, seeinge those that use much talke, though they speake truly, are never beleeved."

[6] Prov. xv. 2. [7] Prov. xviii. 2.

you have to be cautious. A Christian feels that for every idle word he utters he will have to give account, and as none of his words are to be idle they must be comparitively few; the word that kindles wrath, the lie, the whisper, the slander, can therefore find no place on his lips.

This brings us to the *Good and beautiful uses of the tongue*, those uses which justify us in calling the tongue of the wise Health.[1] First of all the tongue has the gracious power of soothing and restraining anger. It is the readiest instrument of peace-making. Gentleness of speech allays great offences,[2] and by preventing quarrels, disarming wrath, and healing the wounds of the spirit, it maintains its claim to be a tree of life.[3] If in the tumult of passion, when fiery charges are made and grievous provocations are uttered, the tongue can be held in firm restraint, and made to give a soft answer, the storm will subside, the angry assailant will retire abashed,[4] and the flaming arrows will be quenched in the buckler of meekness which opposes them. Nor is the tongue only defensive in such cases. The pleasant words, spoken out of a kindly and gentle nature, have a purifying effect;[5] they cleanse away the defilements out of which the evil passions sprang; they purge the diseased humours which produce the irritations of life; they supply a sweet food to the poor hearts of men, who are often contentious because they are hungry for sympathy and love. Pleasant

[1] Prov. xii. 18. [2] Eccl. x. 4.

[3] Prov. xv. 4. מַרְפֵּא is best rendered here and in Eccl. x. 4 by "gentleness." It is just that quality of humility and submission and tranquillity which our Lord blessed as meekness.

[4] Prov. xv. 1. [5] Prov. xv. 26.

words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, health to the bones.[1] They must be true words, or they will not in the end be pleasant, for, as we have seen, the sweet bread of falsehood turns to gravel in the mouth. But what a different world this would become if we all spoke as many pleasant words as we honestly could, and were not so painfully afraid of showing what tenderness and pity and healing actually exist in our hearts! For another beautiful use of the tongue is to comfort the mourners, of whom there are always so many in the world. "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop." There are these stooping, bowed-down hearts everywhere around us. We wish that we could remove the cause of sorrow, that we could effectually change the conditions which seem unfavourable to joy; but being unable to do this, we often stand aloof and remain silent, because we shrink from giving words without deeds, pity without relief. We forget that when the heart is heavy it is just "a good word that maketh it glad."[2] Yes, a word of genuine sympathy, a word from the heart,—and in trouble no other word can be called good,—will often do more to revive the drooping spirit than the grosser gifts of material wealth. A coin kindly given, a present dictated by a heart-felt love, may come as a spiritual blessing; on the other hand, money given without love is worthless, and seldom earns so much as gratitude, while a word in season, how good it is![3] It is better than silver and gold; the discouraged and despondent heart seems to be touched with the delicate finger of hope, and to rise from the ashes and the dust

[1] Prov. xvi. 24. [2] Prov. xii. 25. [3] Prov. xv. 23.

with a new purpose and a new life. It must, of course, be in season. "As vinegar upon nitre so is he that sings songs to a sad heart."[1] But the seasonable word, spoken just at the right moment and just in the right tone, brief and simple, but comprehending and penetrating, will often make the sad heart sing a song for itself.

Great stress is to be laid on this seasonableness of speech, whether the speech be for comfort or reproof. A word fitly spoken, or to preserve the image implied in the original, a word that runs on its wheels in the just and inevitable groove, is compared to a beautiful ornament consisting of golden apples set in an appropriate framework of silver filigree.[2] In such an ornament the golden apples torn from their suitable foil would lose half their beauty, and the silver setting without the apples would only suggest a void and a missing. It is in the combination that the artistic value is to be found. In the same way, the wisest utterance spoken foolishly[3] jars upon the hearers, and misses the mark, while a very simple saying, a platitude in itself, may by its setting become lovely and worthy. The best sermon in a social gathering will seem out of place, but how often can the Christian man by some almost unobserved remark correct unseasonable levity, rebuke unhallowed conversation, and lead the minds of the company to nobler thoughts. The timely word is better than the best sermon in such a case.

[1] Prov. xxv. 20. [2] Prov. xxv. 11.

[3] *Cf.* Eccles. xx. 20: "A wise sentence shall be rejected when it cometh out of a fool's mouth, for he will not speak it in due season."

The use of the tongue in *Reproof* is frequently referred to in these proverbs. "A wise reprover upon an obedient ear" is compared to "an earring of gold, an ornament of fine gold."[1] And rebuke is, as we have seen, preferred before flattery.[2] But how wise we must be before our tongue can fitly discharge this function! How humble must the heart be before it can instruct the tongue to speak at once with firmness and tenderness, without a touch of the Pharisee in its tone, to the erring brother or the offending stranger! A rebuke which springs not from love but from vanity, not from self-forgetfulness but from self-righteousness, will not be like an earring of gold, but rather like an ornament of miserable tinsel chafing the ear, the cause of gangrene, a disfigurement as well as an injury. But if we live in close communion with Christ, and daily receive His stern but tender rebukes into our own souls, it is possible that we may be employed by Him to deliver timely rebukes to our fellow-men.

There are two other noble uses of the tongue to which reference is constantly made in our book; the *Instruction of the ignorant,* and the *Championship of the distressed.* With regard to the first, we are told that "the lips of the wise disperse knowledge," while of course the heart of the foolish not being right cannot possibly impart rightness to others.[3] It is only the wise in heart that can claim the title of prudent, but where that wisdom is "the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning."[4] "The heart of the wise instructeth his mouth and addeth learning to his lips."[5] The lips of knowledge

[1] Prov. xxv. 12.
[2] Prov. xxviii. 23.
[3] Prov. xv. 7.
[4] Prov. xvi. 21.
[5] Prov. xvi 23.

are compared to a precious vessel which is more valuable than gold or rubies.[1] To teach well requires earnest preparation, "the heart of the righteous studieth to answer."[2] But when the right answer to the pupil is discovered and given it is beautifully compared to a kiss on the lips.[3]

But never is the tongue more divinely employed than in using its knowledge or its pleadings to deliver those who are in danger or distress. "Through knowledge the righteous may often be delivered."[4] The mouth of the upright will deliver those against whom the wicked are plotting.[5] It is a great prerogative of wise lips that they are able to preserve not themselves only but others.[6] The true and faithful witness delivers souls.[7] It is this which gives to power its one great attraction for the good man. The ruler, the judge, the person of social consideration or of large means is in the enviable position of being able to "open his mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are left desolate, to judge rightly and minister judgment to the poor and needy."[8]

The Press—that great fourth estate—which represents for us the more extended use of the tongue in modern times, illustrates in the most vivid way the service which can be rendered where speech is fit, and also the injury that can be done where it is rash, imprudent, dishonest, interested, or unjust.

After thus reviewing some of the good uses of the tongue, and observing how they depend on the state

[1] Prov. xx. 15.
[2] Prov. xv. 28.
[3] Prov. xxiv. 26.
[4] Prov. xi. 9.
[5] Prov. xii. 6.
[6] Prov. xiv. 3.
[7] Prov. xiv. 5, 25.
[8] Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

of the heart,[1] we cannot help again laying stress on the need of a wise self-control in all that we say. He that refraineth his lips doeth wisely. A man of understanding holdeth his peace.[2] "He that spareth his words hath knowledge."[3] "Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise, when he shutteth his lips he is prudent."[4] If only the uninstructed and foolish person has sense enough to perceive that wisdom is too high for him he will not open his mouth in the gate,[5] and so in listening he may learn. "Of thine unspoken word thou art master," says an Indian proverb, "but thy spoken word is master of thee." We are to be swift to hear, but slow to speak: we are to ponder all that we hear, for it is only the simple that believes every word, the prudent man looks well to his going.[6] As St. James says, summing up all the teaching that we have reviewed, "If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain."[7]

And now there is only one other point to be noticed, but it is one of vast importance. As we realize the immense power of the tongue and the great issues which depend on its right or wrong employment; as

[1] Note the intimate connection between conduct and speech in such a proverb as xvii. 4. When we do evil we are always ready to listen to evil talk, when we talk deceitfully we are preparing to go on to worse deeds of evil, to listen to tongues of destruction. Note, too, how in xii. 5 the thoughts and the counsels of the heart come before the words and the mouth in v. 6.

[2] Prov. xi. 12. [3] Prov. xvii. 27.

[4] Prov. xvii. 28. *Cf.* the old Norse proverb:—

"An unwise man when he comes among the people
Had best be silent: no one knows
That he nothing knows unless he talks too much."

[5] Prov. xxiv. 7. [6] Prov. xiv. 15. [7] James i. 26.

we sum up all the evil which its tiny unobserved movements can accomplish, and all the rich blessings which it is, under right supervision, capable of producing; and as from personal experience we recognise how difficult it is to bridle the unruly member, how difficult it is to check the double fountain so that it shall send forth sweet waters only, and no bitter, we may be awed into an almost absolute silence, and be inclined to put away the talent of speech which our Lord has given to us, not daring to use it lest in using we should abuse it. But here is the answer to our misgiving: the plans and preparations of our hearts belong to us, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.[1] This most uncontrollable organ of the body can be put under our Lord's control. He is able to give us "a mouth and wisdom," and to make our words not our own but the utterance of His Holy Spirit. There may be "an ocean round our words which overflows and drowns them," the encircling influences of God, turning even our faultiest speech to good account, neutralising all our falterings and blunderings, and silencing our follies and perversities.

Shall we not put our lips under our Lord's control, that the answer of our tongue may be from Him? While we seek daily to subject our hearts to Him, shall we not in a peculiar and a direct manner subject our tongues, to Him? for while a subjected heart may keep the mouth from speaking evil, if the tongue is to speak well and to be employed for all its noble uses it must be immediately moved by God, our lips must be touched with a coal from the altar, our speech must be chastened and purified, inspired and impelled, by Him.

[1] Prov. xvi. 1.

XIII.

PRIDE AND HUMILITY.

"A wise son heareth his father's instruction, but a scorner heareth not rebuke."—PROV. xiii. 1.

"Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth correction, but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured."—PROV. xiii. 18.

"By pride cometh only contention, but with the well advised is wisdom."—PROV. xiii. 10.

"Whoso despiseth the word bringeth destruction on himself; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded."—PROV. xiii. 13.

This last proverb appears in another form, as, "He that giveth heed unto the word shall find good, and whoso trusteth in the Lord happy is he."—PROV. xvi. 20.

BY a proud man we mean one who esteems himself better than others; by a humble man we mean one who counts others better than himself. The proud man is so convinced of his intrinsic superiority that if appearances are against him, if others obtain more recognition, honour, wealth than he, the fault seems to him to lie in the evil constitution of the world, which cannot recognize merit; for his own intrinsic superiority is the axiom which is always to be taken for granted; "his neighbours therefore find no favour in his eyes, and he even desires their calamity and ruin," in order, as he would put it, that every one may be set in his due place.[1] Meanwhile he is always boasting of

[1] Prov. xxi. 10.

possessions, dignities, and gifts which do not yet, but some day will, appear to the public eye. He is like clouds which overcast the sky, and wind which frets the earth, without bringing any wholesome rain.[1] If, on the other hand, appearances are with him, if wealth, dignity, and honour fall to his share, he is affably convinced of his own supreme excellence; the proof of his own conviction is written large in his broad acres, his swelling dividends, and his ever-increasing troops of flatterers and friends; and he moves smoothly on to—what?—strange to say, little as he thinks it, to destruction, for "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."[2] If he only knew he would say, "Better is it to be of a lowly spirit with the meek than to divide the spoil with the proud;"[2] for "before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour goeth humility."[3] The event shows, if not in this world, yet the more surely in the next, that it is well to "let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips."[4]

When our eyes are open to see things as they are, we are no longer in the least impressed by the "proud and haughty man whose name is scorner working in the arrogance of pride."[5] We may not live to see it, but we are quite persuaded that "a man's pride shall bring him low, but he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honour."[6] "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him."[7]

Now what are the evil-effects of pride, and what are the blessings that follow on humility?

[1] Prov. xxv. 14.
[2] Prov. xvi. 18, 19.
[3] Prov. xviii. 12.
[4] Prov. xxvii. 2.
[5] Prov. xxi. 24.
[6] Prov. xxix. 23.
[7] Prov. xxvi. 12.

First of all, pride cuts a man off from all the salutary effects of reproof, rebuke, criticism, and counsel, without which it is not possible for any of us to become wise. "A wise son" is the result of "a father's correction," says the text, and such a son makes his father glad;[1] but the pride in a child's heart will often prevent him from receiving even the correction of a father, and will lead him to despise his mother. And if the parents have not firmness and wisdom enough to overcome this childish resistance, it will grow with years, and prove more and more disastrous. "He is in the way of life that heedeth correction, but he that forsaketh reproof erreth."[2] If he had loved reproof he would have acquired knowledge, but hating it he becomes brutish.[3] It is evident then that this pride is folly. He is a fool that despises his father's correction, but he that regardeth reproof getteth prudence.[4] He that refuseth correction despiseth his own soul, but he that hearkeneth to reproof getteth understanding.[5]

When we are grown up, and no longer under the tutelage of parents who love us, pride is still more likely to harden our hearts against criticism and counsel. The word of warning falls on the proud ear in vain, just because it is the word of warning, and often does the wilful heart mourn as it suffers the penalty of its stubbornness.[6] A man who refuses

[1] Prov. xiii. 1; xv. 20.
[2] Prov. x. 17.
[3] Prov. xii. 1.
[4] Prov. xv. 8.
[5] Prov. xv. 32.
[6] Prov. xiii. 13 should be translated: "Whoso despiseth the word (*sc.* of warning and rebuke) shall be under a pledge to it (*i.e.* he has contracted an obligation to the word by hearing it, and in case of disobedience will have to redeem this implicit pledge by suffering and remorse), but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded."

correction is a synonym for poverty and shame.[1] These words which we in our pride despise might be an incalculable benefit to us. Even the most witless criticism may be useful to a humble mind, even the most unjust attacks may lead us to wholesome self-searching, and to a more careful removal of possible offences. While if the criticism is fair, and prompted by a kind heart, or if the rebuke is administered by one whose wisdom and justice we respect, it is likely to do us far more good than praise and approval. "A rebuke entereth deeper into one that hath understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool"[2] "Better is open rebuke than love that is hid."[3] If we were wise we should value this plain and honest speaking much more than the insipid flattery which is often dictated by interested motives.[4] In fact, praise is a very questionable benefit; it is of no use at all unless we carefully test it, and try it, and accept it with the greatest caution, for only a small part of it is pure metal, most of it is mere dross;[5] and praise that is not deserved is the most dangerous and deleterious of delights. But rebuke and criticism cannot do us much harm. Many great and noble men have been ruined by admiration

[1] Prov. xiii. 17.
[2] Prov. xvii. 10.
[3] Prov. xxvii. 5.
[4] Prov. xxviii. 23.
[5] Prov. xxvii. 21: "The fining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man for the mouth of his praise." This somewhat obscure aphorism is most simply explained thus:—A man should make his conscience a kind of furnace, in which he tries all the laudatory things which are said of him, accepting only the refined and pure metal which results from such a test, and rejecting the dross. This is simpler than, with Delitzsch, to explain, "a man is tested by the praise which is bestowed upon him as silver and gold are tested in the fire."

and popularity, who might have thriven, growing greater and nobler, in the fiercest and most relentless criticism. Donatello, the great Florentine sculptor, went at one time of his life to Padua, where he was received with the utmost enthusiasm, and loaded with approbation and honours. But soon he declared his intention of returning to Florence, on the ground that the sharp assaults and the cutting criticisms which always assailed him in his native city were much more favourable to his art than the atmosphere of admiration and eulogy. In this way he thought that he would be stimulated to greater efforts, and ultimately attain to a surer reputation. In the same spirit the greatest of modern art critics has told us how valuable to him were the criticisms which his humble Italian servant made on his drawings. Certainly, "with those who allow themselves to be advised is wisdom."[1] "He that trusteth in his own heart," and cannot receive the advice of others, "is a fool; but whoso walketh wisely he shall be delivered," sometimes perhaps by the humble suggestions of very simple people.[2]

Yes, "with the lowly is wisdom:"[3] they "hearken to counsel,"[4] and in doing so they get the advantage of many other wits, while the proud man is confined strictly to his own, and however great his capacity may be, it is hardly probable that he will sum up all human wisdom in himself. The lowly gives heed to the word, no matter who speaks it, and finds good;[5] he abides among the wise, because he is always ready to learn; consequently, he becomes wise, and eventually he gets

[1] Prov. xiii. 10.
[2] Prov. xxviii. 26.
[3] Prov. xi. 2.
[4] Prov. xii. 15*b*.
[5] Prov. xvi. 20.

the honour which he deserves.[1] It is in this way that people of lowly station and very moderate abilities often come to the front. "A servant that deals wisely has rule over a son that causes shame, and has part in the inheritance among the brethren."[2] To a crafty son no good shall be, but to a servant who is wise his actions shall prosper and his way be made straight.[3] The consciousness of not being clever, and a wise diffidence in our own judgment, will often make us very thankful to learn from others and save us from the follies of wilfulness; and thus very much to their own astonishment the humble find that they have outdistanced their more brilliant competitors in the race, and, walking in their humility, unexpectedly light upon recognition and admiration, honour and love.

This first point, then, becomes very clear in the light of experience. One of the most injurious effects of Pride is to cut off its miserable victim from all the vast help and service which rebuke and criticism can render to the humble. One of the sweetest results of genuine humility is that it brings us to the feet of all wise teachers; it multiplies lessons for us in all the objects which surround us; it enables us to learn even from those who seem to be too captious to teach, or too malevolent to be even wise. The humble mind has all the wisdom of the ages as its possession, and all the folly of fools as an invaluable warning.

Secondly, by pride comes nothing but strife,[4] and

[1] Prov. xv. 31, 33. [2] Prov. xvii. 2.
This is an addition of the LXX. to xiii. 13, and may represent an original Hebrew text. For the idea cp. Eccles. x. 25, "Unto the servant that is wise shall they that are free do service."
[4] Prov. xiii. 10.

he loveth transgression that loveth strife; he that raiseth high his gate, *i.e.*, builds a lofty house, seeketh destruction.[1] It is the pride of monarchs and nations which produces war; the sense of personal dignity which is always sudden and quick in quarrel; the feeling of swollen self-importance which is afraid to make peace lest it should suffer in the eyes of men. And in the affairs of private life our pride, rather than our sense of right, usually creates, fosters, and embitters divisions, alienations, and quarrels. "I am perfectly innocent," says Pride; "I bear no resentment, but it would be absurd for me to make the first advances; when those advances are made, I am willing to forgive and to forget." "I think I am innocent," says Humility, "but then I may have been very provoking, and I may have given offence without knowing it; in any case, I may as well make an offer of apology; if I fail, I fail."

Nor is this the only way in which strife grows out of pride, for "by pride comes *nothing but* strife." All the foolish extravagances of social competition are to be traced to the same source. One man "raises high his gate," builds a fine house, and furnishes it in the best way. He flatters himself that his "little place" is tolerably comfortable, and he speaks with some contemptuous pity of all his neighbours' houses. Immediately all his neighbours enviously strive to excel him, and pride vies with pride, heartburnings are many and bitter. Then there comes on the scene one who in wealth and ostentation of wealth exceeds them all, and the first man is now racked with envy, strains every nerve to outdo the insolent intruder, suffers his debts

[1] Prov. xvii. 19.

to far exceed his assets, and soon incurs the inevitable crash. That is how pride works in one very obvious department of social life. But it is the same in every other department. Who can calculate the miseries which are produced by the grotesque assumptions of poor mortals to be superior to their fellow-mortals? Parents will mar their children's lives by refusing their consent to marriages with those who, for some perfectly artificial reason, are held to be beneath them; or will still more fatally ruin their children's happiness by insisting on alliances with those who are held to be above them. Those who prosper in the world will heartlessly turn their backs on relations who have not prospered. Men who earn their living in one particular way, or in no particular way, will loftily contemn those who earn their living in another particular way. Those who dress in the fashion will look in another direction when they pass people who do not dress in the fashion, though they may be under deep obligations to these slighted friends. This is all the work of pride. Then there are the sneers, the taunts, the sarcasms, the proud man's scorn, like "a rod in the mouth" indeed,[1] which falls with cutting cruelty on many tender backs and gentle faces. The overbearing temper of one who "bears himself insolently and is confident"[2] will sometimes take all the sweetness out of life for some delicate woman, or shrinking child, or humble dependent, bruising the poor spirit, rending the terrified heart, unnerving and paralysing the weaker and more helpless nature.

From first to last this haughty spirit is a curse and a torment to everyone, and not least to itself. It is

[1] Prov. xiv. 3. [2] Prov. xiv. 16.

like a cold and biting wind. It is like an erosive acid. It produces more sorrows than the north wind produces icicles. It mars more lives than anyone but God is able to count. It breaks the hearts of the humble, it excites the passions of the wrathful, it corrupts the conduct of the weak. It ruins children, it poisons social life, it inflames differences, and plunges great nations into war.

If it were permitted to enter heaven, it would turn heaven into hell, it would range the hosts of heaven in envious cliques and mutually scornful castes, it would make the meek spirit sigh for earth, where there was at least the hope of death, and would turn the very presence and power of God into a constant object of envy and an incentive to rebellion. It is obvious, then, that pride cannot enter heaven, and the proud man, if he is to enter, must humble himself as a little child.

Third—and this leads us to contemplate the worst result of Pride and the loveliest outcome of Humility—"Every one that is proud of heart is an abomination to the Lord; though hand join in hand he shall not be unpunished."[1] "The Lord will root up the house of the proud; but He will establish the border of the widow."[2] In a word, Pride is hateful to God, who resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. The proud man, whether he knows it or not, comes into direct conflict with God: he may not intend it, but he is pitting himself against the Omnipotent. That hardening of the face is a sign of evil, just as the patient humble ordering of the way is a sign of righteousness.[3] In that high look and proud heart there seems to be something

[1] Prov. xvi. 5. [2] Prov. xv. 25. [3] Prov. xxi. 29.

dignified, flashing, and luminous; it is undoubtedly much admired by men. By God it is not admired; it is regarded merely as the lamp of the wicked, and as sin.[1] The light, such as it is, comes from hell; it is the same light that burned on the faces of the apostate angels "o'erwhelmed with floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire." The proud man dares the thunderbolts of God. He scorns men whom he sees, and in doing so he scorns God whom he has not seen; the men whom he consciously scorns cannot, but the God whom he unwittingly scorns will, take vengeance upon him. He has hardened his heart, he has grown great in his own eyes, he has despised the creatures made in God's image; he will suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy.

On the other hand, by humility men learn to know and to fear the Lord.[2] God reveals Himself to the humble heart, not as a King of Terrors, but kind and good, with healing in His wings, leading the contrite spirit to implicit trust in Himself, and "whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he."[3] When we realize this we cannot wonder that so few people seem to know God; men are too proud; they think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, and consequently they do not think at all of Him; they receive honour one of another, and eagerly desire such honour, and consequently they cannot believe in Him, for to believe in Him implies the desire of no honour except such as comes from Him.

It is a strange truth that God should dwell in a

[1] Prov. xxi. 4.

[2] Prov. xxii. 4. The probable rendering is, "The outcome of humility is the fear of the Lord, riches, honour, and life."

[3] Prov. xvi. 20.

human heart at all, but it is almost self-evident that if He is to dwell in any human heart it must be in one which has been emptied of all pride, one which has, as it were, thrown down all the barriers of self-importance, and laid itself open to the incoming Spirit. If we cling to ever so little of our natural egotism; if we dwell on any imagined excellence, purity, or power of our own; if we are conscious of any elation, any springing sense of merit, which would set us, in our own judgment, on some equality with God,—how could the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity enter in? That thought of vanity would seek to divide our nature with Him, would enter into negotiations for a joint occupation, and the insulted Spirit of God would depart.

If in ordinary human affairs "before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour goeth humility;"[1] if even in our dealings with one another happiness and success and prosperity depend on the cultivation of a modest spirit, how much more when we come to deal with God must haughtiness appear the presage of destruction, and humility the only way of approach to Him!

It is not possible to think too humbly of yourself, it is not possible to be too lowly, you cannot abase yourself too much in His Holy Presence. Your only attitude is that of Moses when he took off his shoes because the place he stood on was holy ground; or that of Isaiah when he cried out that he was "a man of unclean lips." To those who know you your humiliations may sound excessive,—as we are told the

[1] Prov. xviii. 12.

disciples of St. Francis remonstrated with him for his self-depreciation [1]—but not to God or to your own heart. And He, if He has set His love upon you, and purposes to make you a temple for His indwelling, will use method after method of humbling you to prepare for His entrance. Again and again you will say, Surely now I am low enough, am I not humbled in the dust? But His hand will still be upon you, and He will show you heads of pride which have yet to be levelled down. In the last humbling you will find that there is rising within you a certain pride in the humility itself. That also will He subdue. And some day, if you are willing, you shall be lowly enough for the Most High to dwell in, humble enough to offer a perpetual incense of praise.

[1] The answer of the saint was very characteristic. Could he really believe that he was so vile as he said, when he compared himself with others who were obviously worse? "Ah," he said, "it is when I recount all God's exceptional mercies to me that I seem to myself the worst of men, for others have not had such favours at His hands."

XIV.

THE INWARD UNAPPROACHABLE LIFE.

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy."—PROV. xiv. 10.

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth is heaviness."—PROV. xiv. 13.

> "Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
> With echoing straits between us thrown,
> Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
> We mortal millions live *alone*.
> The islands feel the enclasping flow,
> And then their endless bounds they know."
>
> MATTHEW ARNOLD.

WE know each other's appearance, it is true, but there for the most part our mutual knowledge ceases. Some of us unveil nothing of ourselves to anyone; some of us unveil a little to all; some a good deal to a few; but none of us can unveil all even to the most intimate friend. It is possible to live on terms of complete confidence and even close intimacy with a person for many years, to become thoroughly acquainted with his habits, his turns of expression, his modes of thought, to be able to say with a certain infallibility what course he will take in such and such circumstances —and yet to find by some chance uplifting of a curtain in his life that he cherished feelings which you never even suspected, suffered pains of which you had seen

no trace, and enjoyed pleasures which never came to any outward expression.

How true this is we realize at once if we turn inwards and review all the thoughts which chase each other through our brain, and all the emotions which throb in our heart for a single day, and then deduct those which are known to any human being, known or even suspected; the sum total we find is hardly affected at all. We are quite startled to discover how absolutely alone we live, how impossible it is for a stranger, or even for an intimate friend, to meddle with more than a fragment of our inner life. This is not because we have any wish to conceal, but rather because we are not able to reveal, our silent unseen selves; it is not because others would not like to know, but because they have not the instruments to investigate, that within us which we on our part are quite helpless to express.

For instance, "the desire accomplished is sweet to the soul,"[1] yet no one can know how sweet but he who cherished the desire. When a man has laboured for many years to secure an adequate maintenance for his family, and at length finds himself in easy circumstances, with his children growing up around him well and happy, no one besides himself can in the least gauge the sense of satisfaction, contentment, and gratitude which animates his heart, because no one can realize without actual experience the long and anxious days, the sickening fears, the blighted hopes, the rigorous sacrifices, through which he passed to attain his end. Or, when an artist has been toiling for many years to

[1] Prov. xiii. 19.

realize upon canvas a vision of beauty which floats before the inward eye, and at last succeeds, by some happy combination of colours, or by some dexterous sweep of the brush, or by some half-inspired harmony of form and composition, in actually bodying forth to the senses that which has haunted his imagination, it is hopeless for any one else to understand the thrilling joy, the light-hearted ecstasy, which are hidden rather than expressed by the quiet flush on the cheek and the sparkling glance of the eye.

The mystical joy of a love which has just won an answering love; the deep-toned joy of the mother in the dawning life of her child; the joy of the poet who feels all the beauty of the earth and the sky pulsing through his nerves and raising his heart to quick intuitions and melodious numbers; the joy of the student, when the luminous outlines of truth begin to shape themselves before his mind in connected form and startling beauty; the joy of one who has toiled for the restoration of lost souls, and sees the fallen and degraded awaking to a new life, cleansed, radiant and strong; the joy of the martyr of humanity, whose dying moments are lit with visions, and who hears through the mysterious silences of death the voices of those who will one day call him blessed,—joys like these may be described in words, but they who experience them know that the words are, relatively speaking, meaningless, and they who do not experience them can form no conception of them. "When the desire cometh it is a tree of life,"[1] which suddenly springs up in the garden of the heart, puts forth its jubilant leaves of healing, flashes with

[1] Prov. xiii. 12.

white wings of scented blossom, and droops with its full offering of golden fruit, as if by magic, and we are surprised ourselves that those around us do not see the wonder, do not smell the perfume, do not taste the fruit: we alone can sit under its branches, we alone can catch the murmur of the wind, the music of achievement, in its leaves.

But this thought becomes very pathetic when we think of the heart's bitterness, which the heart alone can know,—the hope deferred which makes it sick,[1] the broken spirit which dries up the bones,[2] the spirit which for so long bore a man's infirmity, and then at last broke because it could bear no more, and became itself intolerable.[3] The circumstances of a man's life do not give us any clue to his sorrows; the rich have troubles which to the poor would seem incredible, and the poor have troubles which their poverty does not explain. There are little constitutional ailments, defects in the blood, slight deformities, unobserved disabilities, which fill the heart with a bitterness untold and unimaginable. There are crosses of the affections, disappointments of the ambitions; there are frets of the family, worries of business; there are the haunting Furies of past indiscretions, the pitiless reminders of half-forgotten pledges. There are weary doubts and misgivings, suspicions and fears, which poison all inward peace, and take light out of the eye and elasticity out of the step. These things the heart knows, but no one else knows.

What adds to the pathos is that these sorrows are often covered with laughter as with a veil, and no one

[1] Prov. xiii. 12. [2] Prov. xvii. 22. [3] Prov. xviii. 14.

suspects that the end of all this apparently spontaneous mirth is to be heaviness.[1] The bright talker, the merry jester, the singer of the gay song, goes home when the party separates, and on his threshold he meets the veiled sorrow of his life, and plunges into the chilly shadow in which his days are spent.

The bitterness which surges in our brother's heart would probably be unintelligible to us if he revealed it; but he will not reveal it, he cannot. He will tell us some of his troubles, many of them, but the bitterness he must keep to himself.

How strange it seems! Here are men and women around us who are unfathomable; the heart is a kind of infinite; we skim the surface, we cannot sound the depths. Here is a merry heart which makes a cheerful countenance, but here is a countenance unclouded and smiling which covers a spirit quite broken.[2] Here is a cheerful heart which enjoys a continual feast,[3] and finds in its own merriment a medicine for its troubles;[4] but we cannot find the secret of the cheerfulness, or catch the tone of the merriment, any more than we can comprehend what it is which is making all the days of the afflicted evil.[5]

We are confined as it were to the superficial effects, the lights and shadows which cross the face, and the feelings which express themselves in the tones of the voice. We can guess a little of what lies underneath, but our guesses are as often wrong as right. The index is disconnected, perhaps purposely, from the reality. Sometimes we know that a heart is bitter,

[1] Prov. xiv. 13. [2] Prov. xv. 13. [3] Prov. xv. 15*b*. [4] Prov xvii. 22. [5] Prov. xv. 15.

but do not even surmise the cause; more often it is bitter and we do not know it. We are veiled to one another; we know our own troubles, we feel our own joys, that is all we can say.

And yet the strangest thing of all is that we hunger for sympathy; we all want to see that light in the eyes of our friends which rejoices the heart, and to hear those good things which make the bones fat.[1] Our joy is eager to disclose itself, and often shrinks back appalled to find that our companions did not understand it, but mistook it for an affectation or an illusion. Our sorrow yearns for comprehension, and is constantly doubled in quantity and intensity by finding that it cannot explain itself or become intelligible to others. This rigid and necessary isolation of the human heart, along with such a deep-rooted desire for sympathy, is one of the most perplexing paradoxes of our nature; and though we know well that it is a fact, we are constantly re-discovering it with a fresh surprise. Forgetting it, we assume that every one will know how we need sympathy, though we have never hung out the signals of distress, and have even presented a most repellent front to all advances; forgetting it, we give expression to our joy, singing songs to heavy hearts, and disturbing others by unseasonable mirth, as if no icy channels separated us from our neighbours' hearts, making our gladness seem frigid and our merriment discordant before it reaches their ears. Yes the paradox forces itself on our attention again; human hearts are isolated, alone, without adequate communication, and essentially uncommunicative, yet

[1] Prov. xv. 30.

all of them eagerly desiring to be understood, to be searched, to be fused. Is it a paradox which admits of any explanation? Let us see.

It has been very truly said, "Man is only partially understood, or pitied, or loved by man; but for the fulness of these things he must go to some far-off country." In proportion as we are conscious of being misunderstood, and of being quite unable to satisfy our longing for sympathy and comprehension at human fountains, we are impelled by a spiritual instinct to ask for God; the thought arises in us that He, though He be very far off, must, as our Creator, understand us; and as this thought takes possession of the heart a tremulous hope awakes that perhaps He is not very far off. There lie before us now some beautiful sayings which are partly the expression of this human conviction, and seem partly to be inspired by the Divine response to it. "If thou sayest, Behold, we knew not this man; doth not He that weigheth the heart consider, and he that keepeth the soul, doth not He know?"[1] "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them."[2] How obvious is the inference that the Maker of the ear and the eye hears those silent things which escape the ear itself, and sees those recesses of the human heart which the human eye is never able to search! "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good."[3] "Sheol and Abaddon are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men."[4] He

[1] Prov. xxiv. 12, marginal reading.
[2] Prov. xx. 12.
[3] Prov. xv. 3.
[4] Prov. xv. 11.

sees in the heart what the heart itself does not see. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits."[1] In fact, the spirit of man itself, the consciousness which clears into self-consciousness, and becomes in moral matters conscience, this "spirit, is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of the belly,"[2] so that a "man's goings are of the Lord;" and he is often moved by this indwelling spirit and guided by this mysterious lamp in a way which "he can hardly understand."[3]

This intimacy of knowledge is not without its most solemn, and even terrible, side. It means of course that the Lord knows "the thoughts of the righteous which are just, and the counsels of the wicked which are deceit."[4] It means that out of His minute and infallible knowledge He will render to every man according to his works, judging with faultless accuracy according to that "desire of a man which is the measure of his kindness," recognizing the "wish of the poor man," which, though he has not power to perform it, is more valuable than the boasted performances of those who never act up to their power of service.[5] It means that "the Lord trieth the hearts just as the fining pot tries the silver, and the furnace the gold."[6] It means that in thought of such a searching eye, such a comprehensive understanding on the part of the Holy One, none of us can ever say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin."[7]

All this it means, and there must be some terror in

[1] Prov. xvi. 2, rep. xxi. 2.
[2] Prov. xx. 27.
[3] Prov. xx. 24.
[4] Prov. xii. 5.
[5] Prov. xix. 22.
[6] Prov. xvii. 3.
[7] Prov. xx. 9.

the thought; but the terror, as we begin to understand, becomes our greatest comfort; for He who thus understands us is the Holy One. Terrible would it be to be searched and known in this minute way by one who was not holy, by one who was morally indifferent, by one who took a curious interest in studying the pathology of the conscience, or by one who had a malignant delight in cherishing vices and rewarding evil thoughts. Though we sometimes desire human sympathy in our corrupt passions and unhallowed desires, and are eager for our confederates in sin to understand our pleasures and our pains,—and out of this desire, it may be observed, comes much of our base literature, and all of our joining with a company to do evil,—yet after all we only desire this confederacy on the understanding that we can reveal as little, and conceal as much, as we like; we should no longer be eager to share our feelings if we understood that in the first contact our whole heart would be laid bare, and all the intricacies of our mind would be explored. We must desire that He who is to search us through and through should be holy, and even though He be strict to mark iniquity, should be one who tries the heart in order to purify it. And when we are awakened and understand, we learn to rejoice exceedingly that He who comes with His lamp to search the inmost recesses of our nature is He who can by no means tolerate iniquity, or pass over transgression, but must burn as a mighty fire wherever He finds the fuel of sin to burn.

Have we not found a solution of the paradox? The human heart is isolated; it longs for sympathy, but cannot obtain it; it seems to depend for its happiness

on being comprehended, but no fellow-creature can comprehend it; it knows its own bitterness, which no one else can know; it broods over its own joys, but no one can share them. Then it makes discovery of the truth that God can give it what it requires, that He fully understands, that He can enter into all these silent thoughts and unobserved emotions, that He can offer an unfailing sympathy and a faultless comprehension. In its need the lonely heart takes refuge in Him, and makes no murmur that His coming requires the searching, the chastisement, and the purging of sin.

No human being needs to be misunderstood or to suffer under the sense of misunderstanding. Let him turn at once to God. It is childish to murmur against our fellows, who only treat us as we treat them; they do not comprehend us, neither do we comprehend them; they do not give us, as we think, our due, neither do we give them theirs; but God comprehends both them and us, and He gives to them and to us accurately what is due.

No human being is compelled to bear his bitterness alone, for though he cannot tell it or explain to his fellows, he can tell it, and he need not explain it, to God. Is the bitterness an outcome of sin, as most of our bitterness is? Is it the bitterness of a wounded egotism, or of a remorseful conscience, or of spiritual despondency? Or is it the bitterness which springs from the cravings of an unsatisfied heart, the thirst for self-completeness, the longing for a perfect love? In either case God is perfectly able and willing to meet the need. He delights to turn His knowledge of our nature to the purpose of cleansing and transforming

the sinful heart: "By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many," He says. He is ready, too, to shed abroad His own rich love in our hearts, leaving no room for the hankering desire, and creating the peace of a complete fulfilment.

No human being need imagine that he is unappreciated; his fellow-men may not want him, but God does. "The Lord hath made every thing for His own purpose, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."[1] He apprehends all that is good in your heart, and will not suffer a grain of pure gold to be lost; while He sees too every particle of evil, and will not suffer it to continue. He knows where the will is set upon righteousness, where the desire is turned towards Him, and will delicately encourage the will, and bountifully satisfy the desire. He sees, too, when the will is hardened against Him, and the desire is set upon iniquity, and He is mercifully resolved to visit the corrupt will and the evil desire with "eternal destruction from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His might,"—mercifully, I say, for no torture could be more terrible and hopeless than for the evil man to live eternally in the presence of God.

Finally, no human being need be without a sharer of his joy: and that is a great consideration, for joy unshared quickly dies, and is from the beginning

[1] Prov. xvi. 4. This strange saying, interpreted in the light of the Gospel, cannot mean that wicked people are actually made in order to exhibit the righteousness and judgment of God in their punishment on the day of wrath, though that was probably the thought in the mind of the writer. But it reminds us of the truth that every human being is a direct concern of the Maker, who has His own wise purpose to fulfil in even the most inconsiderable and apparently abortive life.

haunted by a vague sense of a shadow that is falling upon it. In the heart of the Eternal dwells eternal joy. All loveliness, all sweetness, all goodness, all truth, are the objects of His happy contemplation; therefore every really joyful heart has an immediate sympathiser in God; and prayer is quite as much the means by which we share our gladness as the vehicle by which we convey our sorrows to the Divine heart. Is it not beautiful to think of all those timid and retiring human spirits, who cherish sweet ecstasies, and feel glowing exultations, and are frequently caught up in heavenly raptures, which the shy countenance and stammering tongue never could record? They feel their hearts melt with joy in the prospect of broad skies and sunlit fields, in the sound of morning birds and rushing streams; they hear great choirs of happy spirits chanting perpetually in heaven and in earth, and on every side of their obscure way open vistas of inspired vision. No stranger meddles with their joy, or even knows of it. God is not a stranger; to Him they tell it all, with Him they share it, and their joy is part of the joy of the Eternal.

XV.

A PASSIONATE DISPOSITION.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but a grievous word stirreth up anger." In the LXX. there is another clause inserted at the beginning, *Ὀργὴ ἀπόλλυσι καὶ φρονίμους, ἀπόκρισις δὲ ὑποπίπτουσα ἀποστρέφει θυμόν, λόγος δὲ λυπηρὸς ἐγείρει ὀργάς.*"—PROV. xv. 1.

"A meek tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit."—PROV. xv. 4.

"A wrathful man stirreth up contention: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife."—PROV. xv. 18.

BAD temper causes more suffering than the modified severity with which we judge it would imply. It is in a home what toothache is in the body: the pain is insufferable and yet it is not treated as serious. A passionate man or woman spreads a pervading sense of irritation in the house or in the workshop, and all the other occupants of the place are as if they dwelt in a country subject to earthquakes; life for them is divided between anxiety to avoid the explosion and a painful effort to repair its devastations. We are not severe enough on these faults of temper in ourselves or in others; we are too prone to excuse them on the ground of temperament, as if we were no more responsible for outbreaks of passion than for the colour of our hair or the tone of our complexion. It will, therefore, do us good to see what the Wise Man says on the subject.

First of all, we have several proverbs which remind

us how irritating an angry disposition is: it is the constant occasion of strife; it grows itself by each fresh annoyance that it gives, so that it quickly becomes ungovernable, and thus "the wrathful man aboundeth in transgression."[1] A fierce ungovernable temper will set a whole city in a flame,[2] and lead to disasters of national and even world-wide extent. However peaceful and happy a community may be, if a choleric man enters it, signs of combustion will soon begin to appear. There are always hot embers which wise men are earnestly trying to damp down,[2] there are trivial irritations, petty annoyances, incipient envies, which are only too easily inflamed; the cool spirit and the conciliatory word and the ingenious diversion of thought will keep the embers choked until the heat dies away, but "as coals to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife."[3]

We may well be cautioned to give such an inflammatory character a wide berth; "Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; and with a wrathful man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."[4] Even a sweet temper may be chafed into peevishness by constant irritations; with passionate people the gentlest become passionate in self-defence. When this unbridled, ill-disciplined nature approaches, we should avoid it as if it were a bear robbed of her whelps, for such is this fool in his folly.[5]

This leads us to notice that anger and folly are very closely allied. The passionate nature is constantly

[1] Prov. xxix. 22.
[2] Prov. xxix. 8.
[3] Prov. xxvi. 21.
[4] Prov. xxii 24.
[5] Prov. xvii. 12.

betrayed into actions which sober wisdom must condemn,—"He that is soon angry will deal foolishly. . . . He that is slow to anger is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly."[1] Any one with a grain of sense will put a check upon his rising temper; his discretion makes him slow to anger, and he never feels to have won such true glory as when he bridles his wrath and passes by an offence without a sign of annoyance or resentment. You may almost be sure that a man is wise if you find that he has a cool spirit.[3] When you see a person who cautiously avoids the ground where strife is apt to be excited, and builds his house on a spot where contention is impossible, you instinctively respect him, for you know it betokens wisdom; but when you see a man always getting involved in quarrels, always showing his teeth,[4] you rightly conclude that he is a fool.[5] "A fool uttereth all his anger: but a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it."[6] If we are naturally irritable or

[1] Prov. xiv. 17, 29.

[2] Prov. xix. 11. "When Lanfranc was prior of Bec he ventured to oppose Duke William's Flemish marriage. In a wild burst of wrath William bade his men burn a manor house of Bec and drive out Lanfranc from Norman ground. He came to see the work done, and found Lanfranc hobbling on a lame horse towards the frontier. He angrily bad him hasten, and Lanfranc replied by a cool promise to go faster out of his land if he would give him a better steed. 'You are the first criminal that ever asked gifts from his judge,' retorted William, but a burst of laughter told that the wrath had gone, and William and Lanfranc drew together again."—Green's *Conquest of England*, p. 551.

[3] Prov. xvii. 27.

[4] This word הִתְנַבֵּעַ, which only occurs here (xx. 3) and in xvii. 14 and xviii. 1, would seem from the cognate root in Arab. and Syr. to mean "setting the teeth together," which is a much more vivid and specific idea than quarrelling.

[5] Prov. xx. 3.

[6] Prov. xxix. 11.

splenetic, wisdom will incline us to avoid occasions which excite us, and to keep a watchful guard over our spirits where the occasions are inevitable. If we neglect such precautions we shall justly be counted fools, and the consequent outbreaks of passion will lead us into fresh exhibitions of folly, and more completely justify the harsh judgment which has been passed upon us.

But not the least sign of the folly which is inherent in passion is the shocking effect which it has upon those who give way to it. As the LXX. version says at the beginning of this chapter, "Anger destroys even the wise." And one whose spirit is without restraint is forcibly compared to a city that is broken down and has no wall;[1] every foe can go up and possess it, every thoughtless child can fling a firebrand into it; the barest word, hint, smirk, shrug of the shoulders, any unintentional slight or reflection, nay, even silence itself, will suddenly set the powder-train on fire, and the consequent explosion will be more destructive to the city itself than to those who are outside. "A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty," and, poor fellow, perhaps it is best that he should, for if you deliver him from the consequence of his passion, that will only encourage him in further outbreaks, and so he will become worse, and your deliverance will be an endless task.[2]

Our great King Henry II. was subject to fits of uncontrollable passion, in which he would roll on the floor and bite the dust, impotent with rage; and all the sorrows of his life and reign, falling heavily upon

[1] Prov. xxv. 28. [2] Prov. xix. 19.

him in his later years, were occasioned by this unhappy temper. At the present time we are told that the Chinese frequently indulge in fits of passionate wrath, which react terribly upon their health and make them physically ill. The wrathful man does mischief to many, but his wrath is like an old arquebus, which, when it is fired, hurts the bearer almost as much as the enemy. It may fail to hit the mark, but it is sure to knock down the marksman.

Probably here the plea will be urged that we cannot help our temper, and it may be said, the suffering which it brings upon us is the best proof that it is an infirmity rather than a vice. Now this excuse cannot be allowed to pass; a certain good bishop on one occasion hearing it urged, in extenuation of a man's conduct, that he had such an unfortunate temper, exclaimed, "Temper, why temper is nine-tenths of Christianity!" If we are not to be blamed for bad temper, then there is no fault or defect or vice which we cannot shift off our own shoulders and lay to the charge of our constitution. But our constitution is no excuse for sin; the most that can be urged is that if we are constitutionally inclined to any particular sin we must seek for a special strength to fortify us against it. If in building a city an ancient engineer had one side more exposed than the rest, protected by no natural escarpments of rock or bends of the river, there he would concentrate all his skill to make the wall impregnable. If you find that one of your bodily organs betrays a tendency to disease, you are careful to avoid the exposure, or the strain, or the derangement, which would unfavourably affect it. If your lungs are delicate you shun fogs and chills; if your heart is feeble you are careful to avoid

any sudden excitement; if your eyes are weak you notice very particularly by what light you read, and are sensitive to the least weariness in those delicate instruments. In the same way, if your special infirmity lies in the temper; if you are easily provoked, or apt to fall into sullenness; if a sudden annoyance excites an uncontrollable passion in your mind, or drops into your heart seeds of bitterness which rapidly grow and become ineradicable; you have your work cut out for you; your daily task will be to avoid the things which produce such ill effects, and to cultivate the habits which lessen the virulent action of these irritant poisons. Few of us realize how wonderfully our constitution is subjected to our own control, and how much we ourselves have to do with the making of it.

You know, we will suppose, that you are easily entangled in a quarrel; you must then prepare yourself before you go out into the business of the day,—"Go not forth hastily to strive, lest . . What wilt thou do in the end, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame?"[1] This realization of what will probably result from your hasty temper will act as a check upon it, and you will be inclined, if you have any ground of offence against your neighbour, to go quietly and debate it with him alone.[2] Or if the contention has been sprung upon you unawares, take care that over the floodgates of your passion has been written this wholesome warning, "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before there be any setting of the teeth."[3] Knowing your danger you must summon to your aid

[1] Prov. xxv 8. [2] Prov. xxv. 9. [3] Prov. xvii. 14. *See* note [4], p. 205.

all the heroism of your nature, and remember that this is the time and the occasion to exercise it. Others have to win their spurs on the battlefield; this is your battlefield, and here your spurs are to be won. Others have to win kingdoms or capture cities; here is the kingdom where you are to reign, this is the city which you are to take. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."[1]

Get at some grand root principle like this: "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all transgressions."[2] Ah, yes, if you are disposed to be angry with men, fill your spirit with love to them; that will soothe your irritable nerves, and will flow over their transgressions so that they cease to annoy you because you cease to see them; when we are fervent in love to one another, the love covers a multitude of sins.[3] Where love comes into the soul we are more anxious to convert those who offend us than to be angry with them.[4] Love saves us from the self-vaunting which exposes us to the annoyances, and provokes the attacks, of the malignant;[5] and it enables us to bear all things, almost without a ruffle or a perturbation. Strange to say, passionate temperaments are often very affectionate; let them cultivate the love in themselves, and it will be the destruction of the evil temper. And where the evil passion comes from a true moroseness, then the fruit can only be destroyed with the root, and the root can only be destroyed when love is shed abroad in the heart.

Or possibly your anger is not of the passionate kind,

[1] Prov. xvi. 32.
[2] Prov. x. 12.
[3] 1 Peter iv. 8.
[4] James v. 20.
[5] 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

but rather stern and resentful, arising from an exaggerated sense of self-importance. A meek[1] heart is not wrathful, and it is the life of the flesh; but where meekness fails, envy enters as rottenness of the bones, and with envy, hatred and malice.[2] A meek[1] tongue not only checks wrath in itself, but soothes it in others; it is a tree of life, just as perverseness in it is a breaking of the spirit.[3] If you thought less of yourself, you would not so frequently feel your dignity offended; you would not require this weapon of wrath always at hand to leap forth and avenge your outraged pride. From the meek heart vengeance dies away. "Say not thou, I will recompense evil: wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee."[4] You are sudden and quick in quarrel, because you think of yourself more highly than you ought to think; and because others do not share your opinion of yourself, you must summon all your artillery of wrath to make them bend the stubborn knee and offer you the due tribute of deference or admiration. For if bad temper comes often from constitutional infirmities which must be carefully watched and controlled, it comes just as frequently from that subtle enemy of our souls, Pride.

But now we come to the important question, How are our evil passions to be cured? And we must frankly admit that our book has no suggestions to offer. Its tendency is to regard our disposition as fixed, our temperament as irreversible, our character

[1] This meaning of מַרְפֵּא, as was observed in Lecture XII., p. 172, seems to yield the best sense in these two passages (cp. xii. 18; xiii. 17), as in Eccl. x. 4, "gentleness allayeth great offences," which is a good commentary on our text.

[2] Prov. xiv. 30. [3] Prov. xv. 4. [4] Prov. xx. 22.

as unchangeable. It points out with crystalline clearness the mischief of wrath and the merit of meekness, but it never so much as entertains the possibility that the wrathful man might become meek, the passionate man patient and gentle.

We have in our analysis of the evil observed that in order to avoid it we must be vigilant to mark and control the first risings of passion; we have noted too that if we were truly loving, anger would die away, and if we were truly humble, the resentments which stir our anger would have nothing to feed upon. But the main difficulty is, how are we to become watchful, since it is the special characteristic of a hasty temper that it overpowers our sentinels before it assaults the city? And how are we to become loving and humble? It is only throwing the difficulty back a step or two, and showing us how insuperable it is, to say that we must become good in one direction in order to escape the evil which lies in another direction. It does not help the Ethiopian to become a European to tell him that Europeans have white skins instead of black; nor can a leopard change his kind because he learns that his spots are his distinctive mark.

There must be a deeper message than that of the Proverbs to solve this practical difficulty; though we may well feel that the book is invaluable in setting before us how greatly we need a deeper message. No infirmity of human nature proves more forcibly than the one with which we are dealing that "some thing out of Nature" must come in if a change is to be effected. "We must be born again;" it is only a regenerate heart which will have the impulse and the ability to watch against the eruption of a passionate

disposition. It is only a regenerate heart which can love in such a way that irritations cease to fret, or that can be humble enough to escape the exasperations of wounded pride. Many of us think lightly of these particular faults, and scarcely designate ill-temper a sin at all; but however we may regard it, the wrathful disposition requires nothing less than Christ, and Him crucified, to cure it, and God deemed it worth while to send His only-begotten Son in order to effect the cure. In Christ Jesus are forces, moral and spiritual, strong enough to control the most uncontrollable rage and to soothe the most irritable temper; and as we can point to no other power which is sufficient for such a change, so few things manifest so strikingly the blessed presence of Christ in the heart as the softened and gentle temper, the removal of all those explosive elements which before He entered were constantly causing trouble and suffering and alarm.

Here is an example taken from a country where the knowledge of the Gospel is comparatively recent. A Japanese gentleman living at Fujioka, who was much addicted to the use of *sáke*, a strong intoxicant, which produced the worst results on his temper, was led through reading a tract on the subject to renounce the evil habit, and to accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour. In proportion as the Divine power mastered him he became a new creature. One day his wife had been careless about some silkworms' eggs, which had become partially destroyed, and she trembled with fear that he would become enraged when he discovered it, and punish her severely, as he had done before. But to her great astonishment, when he found out what had happened he remained perfectly calm, and then said, "We

can distribute them among our poor neighbours, and so they will have a larger crop. Thus it will perhaps be better than if we had sold them and taken all the money ourselves." His wife was so impressed with this change of character that she said, "This is the result of Christianity; I want to become a Christian too." She sought and found, and her whole family sought and found. And not only so, but the neighbours were struck by this "living epistle," and shortly afterwards when the missionary went to Fujioka there were ten persons awaiting baptism. At the present time a good Christian Church is growing up in the place.[1]

Where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns evil passions subside and die away. "Learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly of heart." "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." One who is born again, one whose life is hidden with Christ in God, is necessarily meek, meek as the Lord Himself: not, as we well know, devoid of noble anger or fiery indignation, for indeed it is only the meek heart from which all personal pretensions have been eradicated, and to which no personal feeling can be attributed, that is able to pour out vials of wrath, undeterred and unquenchable, upon all that is base and mean, impure and false, corrupt and cruel; but meek in this beautiful sense, that it never takes offence, never suspects evil, never resents any wrong except moral wrong that is done to others, or spiritual wrong done to God. All the tinder on which angry passions feed has been removed by the Cross of Christ, and therefore the only wrath which can be entertained

[1] *Missionary Review of the World*, Feb. 1889, p. 143.

is such wrath as God feels,—the deep intense glow of consuming indignation against sin.

For our evil tempers, then, our passion, our wrath, our sullen pride, our fretful irritability, our outbreaks of sarcasm, our malignant sneers, there is only one possible cure; we must bring the heart, out of which all the evil comes, to Jesus Christ, that He may create it anew; we must accept our failures as evidence of an imperfect surrender, and come afresh with a more insistent cry, and a more perfect faith, that He may reign in our hearts as undisputed Lord, checking, subduing, warring down, every evil motion there.

XVI.

A JUST BALANCE.

"A just balance and scales are the Lord's: all the weights of the bag are His work."—PROV. xvi. 11.

"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is His delight."—PROV. xi. 1.

"Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord."—PROV. xx. 10.

"Divers weights are an abomination to the Lord; and a false balance is not good."—PROV. xx. 23.

THE sixteenth chapter opens—and we may annex to it the last verse of chap. xv.—with a series of sayings which are grouped together on the principle that the name of the Lord occurs in each. There is no obvious connection between the successive verses, and some of them have been already touched on in previous lectures, but it will be worth while to glance at the series as a whole.

The Lord's presence must be recognised and reverenced before we can make any progress in wisdom, and in His presence we must humble ourselves before we can expect any honour.[1] We are entirely dependent upon Him; although our hearts may form plans, we cannot utter anything aright unless He controls our tongue.[2] However self-satisfied we may be with our

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[1] Prov. xv. 33. [2] Prov. xvi. 1.

own ways, however convinced we may be of our own innocence, He weighs our spirit, and will often find a guilt which our conceit ignores, an impurity which our vanity would hide.[1] We should do well, therefore, to commit all our works to Him, in order that He may revise and correct our purposes and establish those which are good.[2] We cannot think too much of His all-inclusive wisdom and knowledge; everything lies in His hands and is designed for His ends; even the wicked who rebel against Him—men like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Judas, Elymas—must in their inevitable punishment glorify His righteousness and truth.[3] For punishment is absolutely sure; the proud are an abomination to Him, and though they combine to oppose His will and to escape the penalty, it will be quite in vain.[4] On the other hand, where He sees mercy and truth He will purge iniquity, and when men fear Him they will depart from evil.[5] When His smile is upon them and He approves their ways, He will make their path plain, pacifying their enemies, and making their hearts glad.[6] He will guide them, even directing their steps, in such a manner that their own imperfect counsels shall turn to a happy and successful issue.[7] "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he."[8] Indeed we cannot exaggerate the minute observation of the Lord; no detail escapes His eye, no event is beyond His control; even what is generally called Chance is but another name for His unmarked and unknown

[1] Prov. xvi. 2. [2] Prov. xvi. 3. [3] Prov. xvi. 4. *See* note, p. 201. [4] Prov. xvi. 5. [5] Prov. xvi. 6. [6] Prov. xvi. 7. [7] Prov. xvi. 9. *Cf.* Prov. xix. 21: "There are many devices in a man's heart; but the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." [8] Prov. xvi. 20.

direction; the very lot—that lot which settles contentions and separates the strong[1]—cast into the lap is actually disposed by Him;[2] much more, therefore, are the deliberate transactions of commerce—those subtle bonds of the cash nexus which twine man to man and nation to nation—under His constant inspection and a subject of His most interested concern, —"a just balance and scales are the Lord's: all the weights of the bag are His work."

It is, then, as part of the Lord's watchful activity and direct, detailed connection with all the affairs of human life, that He is interested in our business and trade. We may notice at once that this is very characteristic of the Old Testament religion. In the Deuteronomic Law it was written: "Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. A perfect and a just weight shalt thou have; a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, even all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God."[3] Again, in the Levitical Law we

[1] Prov. xviii. 18. John Paton, the missionary to the New Hebrides, uncertain whether to go back to Scotland and plead for more missionaries, and receiving no light from human counsel, says, "After many prayers and wrestlings and tears, I went alone before the Lord, and on my knees cast lots with a solemn appeal to God, and the answer came 'Go home.' In my heart I believe that . . . the Lord condescended to decide for me the path of duty, otherwise unknown and I believe it the more truly now, in view of the aftercome of thirty years of service to Christ that flowed out of the steps then deliberately and devoutly taken." See the *Autobiography*, Second Part (Hodder and Stoughton, 1889).

[2] Prov. xvi. 33.

[3] Deut. xxv. 13-16.

find: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt."[1]

The Israelite was encouraged to think that all the work in which he engaged was ordained by, and therefore under the observation of, his God. "Hate not laborious work, neither husbandry which the Most High hath ordained," says Ecclesiasticus.[2] And there is a striking passage in Isaiah where the operations of agriculture are described in detail, and all are attributed to God, who instructs the husbandman aright and teaches him. It all comes from the "Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom."[3]

But at present we are concerned only with trade as a department of industrial life, and especially with the actual chaffering of exchange, the barter of goods for goods, the weights and measures which settle the quantities, and the rules which must govern all such transactions. We should gather that the commercial fraud of those primitive times took this comparatively simple form: the merchant would have, let us say, a half shekel which came a little short of the regulation weight; or he would have a cubit measure (1 ft. 9 in.) half an inch under a cubit; or he would have a vessel professing to hold a *hin* (*i.e.* a little more than a gallon), but actually holding a little less than a gallon; or he would have a dry measure, marked as an *ephah* (*i.e.* about three pecks), but incapable of holding the ostensible quantity. In an ordinary way he would use these

[1] Lev. xix. 33, 36. [2] Eccles. vii. 15. [3] Isa. xxviii. 23-29.

inadequate measures, and thus nibble a little from every article which he sold to a customer. But in the event of a purchaser presenting himself who had a fuller knowledge or might conceivably act as an inspector and report the fraud to the judge, there would be a just half shekel weight in the bag, a full cubit rule hidden behind the counter, a *hin* or an *ephah* measure of legal dimensions within easy reach. You may smile at such primitive methods of deception, but it requires many generations for a civilized society to elaborate commercial fraud on the large scale.

Now passing at once to our own times and bringing the truth of our text to illuminate them, I should like to say a little to people engaged in business, whether as employers or employed, whether the business is wholesale or retail. And let me assure you that I am not going to attempt a detailed examination and criticism of your business concerns. Such an attempt would be grossly impertinent, and might well expose me, not only to your indignation, but to your ridicule. No, I do not believe that it is the part of the preacher to meddle with matters which he does not understand; he only discredits his message by affecting an omniscience which he cannot possibly possess. I have no doubt that the youth who has been in a warehouse or behind the counter for six months already knows more of commercial habits, of trade practices, of the temptations and difficulties which practically press upon people in business, than I know, or am likely to know if I live to twice my present age. I shall not therefore insult you by attempting to point out evils and expose abuses, to denounce particular frauds, and to hold up any special people or classes of people to moral repro-

bation. My task is quite different; it is this:—I am to remind you, first, that God possesses that omniscience to which I can lay no claim, and therefore is intimately acquainted with all the transactions of your bank, your warehouse, your office, your counter, your workshop; and, secondly, that He regards with intense satisfaction all fair dealing, and with vindictive indignation every fraud, and trick, and lie. And on the strength of this I am to ask you very earnestly to review your lives and your practices in the light of His judgment, and to consider how you may bring all your doings in business into conformity with His will.

Perhaps you will let me, as a man speaking to his fellow-men, as a Christian, I hope, speaking to his fellow-Christians, expand these three points a little.

First. We are all of us tempted to think that a considerable proportion of our life is too insignificant to attract the particular attention of God. We can understand that He takes notice of our entrance into, and our exit from, the world, but we think that between the two limits He leaves us to "devise our own ways." Or possibly we can recognise His interest in the crises of our life, but are inclined to question His minute care of the common and monotonous routine. He marks what business we enter, but, when we are in it, lets us alone. He is interested in our marriage, but, when we are married, leaves husband and wife to adjust their own relations. Or He marks a large business transaction in which there is room for a really gigantic fraud, but cannot pay any attention to a minute sale over the counter, the trivial adulteration of a common article, the ingenious subterfuge for disposing of a damaged or

useless stock. Is not this our unspoken but implicit mode of reasoning? And could anything be more illogical? The Divine Power which could create this infinitely diversified universe must be able to mark every tiniest detail of the tiniest object in it. Great and small are relative terms, and have no significance to Him. Naturalists tell us that in the scale of living creatures, arranged according to size, the common beetle occupies the middle point, the smallest living creature being as much smaller as the largest is larger than it. And yet the microscope, so far from showing that God takes less care with the infinitesimal creations of His hand, rather inclines us to say that the smaller the creature is, the more delicate adjustment, the more exquisite proportions, the more brilliant hues, does it display. Our Lord brought home to us this minuteness of the Divine Mind, this infinite power of embracing the veriest trifles of the creation in His thought and care, by assuring us that not a sparrow falls without His notice and that the hairs of our heads are all numbered.

There is then no logical resting-place, when we are thinking of the Mind of God. If He knows us at all, He knows all about us. If He marks what we consider the important things in our life, He marks equally what we consider the unimportant things. The whole life, with every detail from birth to death, is accurately photographed in the light of His omniscience; and as the exposed plate of the camera receives many details which escape the observation of our eyes, so the smallest and least observed transaction in the daily business, every figure entered truly or falsely in the ledger, every coin dropped justly or dishonestly into the till, every bale, every packet, every thread, every

pin, which changes hands in the market, passes at once into the observant and comprehending mind of God.[1]

Second. But in this exhaustive and detailed knowledge of the way in which you are conducting your business, His warm approval follows everything that is honest and just, His vehement censure lights on all that is dishonest or unjust. It may come as a great comfort to you to know that a little business matter which cost you a considerable struggle the other day was duly noted and recorded by the Lord. I was not present at the time, nor did any one who was near you in the least surmise what was passing. But you suddenly recognised the possibility of making a large profit by simply adopting a very slight subterfuge; what made the case peculiarly difficult was that neighbouring and rival firms to your certain knowledge did the like every day; the innocent faces of wife and children at home seem to urge you, for what a difference would this sum of money make to their comfort and welfare in the coming year! you weighed the little trick over and over again, and set it now in this light, now in that, until at last the black began to seem grey, and the grey almost white. After all, was it a subterfuge? was it not merely a quite legitimate reserve, an even laudable commercial prudence? And then, as

[1] It seems impossible that a general and perfect morality in business can ever be attained apart from this apprehension of an Omniscient Mind weighing and judging, as well as accurately observing, everything done even in secret. In mediæval Europe, when this faith was practically unquestioned, there was a certain honesty and sincerity in handicrafts and in general dealing, until the Church made the fatal blunder of granting indulgences for men's peccadilloes, and professing to exonerate them from the consequences of the truth which she herself in theory held.

you wavered, some clear light of truth fell upon your mind; you saw distinctly what was the right course, and very quietly you took it; the prospect of gain was surrendered, you saw the advantage pass over to your rival; he availed himself of it, and went to church next Sunday just the same. Sometimes you have wondered whether after all you were not too scrupulous.

Now all *that* God knows; it is His delight; He has recorded it already in His Book, and also in your own moral nature, which is the stronger and the better for it.

On the other hand, it must be a subject of some concern to many that the same all-observing, all-recording Mind regards with hatred all the sharp practices by which in business we deceive and defraud one another. I suppose there is a way of making up books which would pass any accountant in London, and yet would not pass the audit of God. I suppose there are gains which to the average commercial conscience of to-day appear fair enough, and yet to the One who weighs the spirits of men seem to be quite illicit. There must be men who made their money long ago in certain ways best known to themselves, and are now living in great comfort; but all the time in the books of God a terrible record stands against them, and as the eye of God falls upon those pages, the moan of the ruined, the cry of the fatherless and the widow, and the horrified entreaties of the helpless come up into His ear.

We have no reason for thinking that the unjust balance has become any less abominable to the Lord because the eager and relentless competition of modern industrial life has multiplied, while it has refined, the methods of fraud, and has created a condition of things in which, as so many people urge, questionable practices

have become actually necessary for one who would keep his head above water. We have no reason to think that God regards it as at all essential that any of us should keep his head above water. The warm and honourable reception given to Lazarus in heaven, when his head had gone under the waters on earth, might lead us to think that what we call failures here may possibly be regarded as grand successes there. But we have every reason to think that double dealing, no matter what may be the plea, is abominable in the sight of the Lord.

It is in vain to point to the great prosperity which has fallen to the lot of some whose dishonourable practices have been notorious. It is beyond a doubt that knavery may be successful in its way and a clever rogue may outdistance an honest dullard. The proverb "Honesty is the best policy" is not, as some people seem to think, in the Bible; honesty may or may not be the best policy, according to the object which you have in view. If your object is simply to amass wealth, the saying will read, "Honesty is the best policy; and where it is not, be dishonest." God does not judge in the least by worldly prosperity. From the parable just alluded to one would conclude that it is, in heaven, a certain presumption against a man; there may yet prove to be truth in the hard saying, "He that dies rich is damned." If God hates these questionable practices which are said to exist in modern trade, and if He enters them all in His black books, they who prosper by employing them are none the less failures: their ruin is sure; their remorse will be as inevitable as their recovery will be impossible.

Third. I come therefore now to urge upon all of

you that you should order all your business ways as in the sight of God, and concern yourselves chiefly with the thought how they may be in conformity with His holy Will. Do not be content with estimating your conduct by the judgment which other men would pass upon it. While such an estimate might reveal many things which would not pass muster, it is doubtful whether their problematical censure will afford an adequate motive for reform, and it is sure to overlook many of the evils which they are bound to wink at, because their own hands are not clean. Do not be content even with estimating your conduct by the standard of your own unaided conscience. Your conscience may at any given time be in a degraded state; in order to keep it quiet you may have brought it down to the level of your conduct. A thief's conscience seldom troubles him unless his theft is unsuccessful, in which case it reproaches him for not being more careful and more skilful. You may, like St. Paul, know nothing against yourself and yet not be thereby justified. For doubtless most of the evil practices of our time represent a conscience that has been stupified with sophistry and deadened with selfishness, so that the worst culprits are the first to put on an air of injured innocence, and those who are least guilty suffer most just because the conscience is still sensitive and has not yet been seared with the usual hot iron.

No, the only safe and effectual method is to bring all your business habits, all the practices of the counter and the counting-house, under the searching eye of the All-seeing One. Unless you realize that He sees and knows, and unless you humbly submit everything to His judgment, you are sure to go wrong; your standard

will insensibly fall, and you will insensibly fall away even from the fallen standard. It is said that peculiar difficulties beset you in the present day; it is said that it was never so hard to be straightforward and above-board in commercial dealings; it is said that the insane Moloch of competition imperatively demands the blood of our youth, and even makes assaults on the established virtues of maturity. It may be so, though we are generally inclined to exaggerate the peculiar temptations of our own time in comparison with those of a former age; but if it is so, then there is all the more urgent a necessity that you should bring your affairs to God's judgment, seek diligently to understand His will, and then ask Him for a peculiar strength to enable you to overcome these peculiar temptations. You will not alter His judgment of your conduct by attempting to ignore it. But by seeking to understand it, and by laying your heart open to be influenced by it, you will find that your conduct is perceptibly altered and apparent impossibilities are overcome, because "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."[1]

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[1] Prov. xvi. 6.

XVII.

FRIENDSHIP.

"A friend loveth at all times, and as a brother is born for adversity."—Prov. xvii. 17. (This rendering, based upon the margin of the R.V., yields a much better sense than the loosely connected, "And a brother is born for adversity.")

ONE of the most striking contrasts between the ancient and the modern world is in the place which is given to Friendship by moralists and religious teachers. In Aristotle's famous treatise on Ethics two books out of nine are devoted to the moral bearings of Friendship, and these books form the climax of the work, and are the natural transition to the work on Politics, or the science of the State. This central position given to the subject by the greatest and most systematic teacher of antiquity, compared with the very subordinate part which friendship plays in Christian ethics, is calculated to make us reflect and enquire. Is not the explanation probably this? Our Lord gave a great new commandment to His disciples, that they should love one another; and though Christian men have as yet but imperfectly understood what He meant, or carried out what they have understood, an ideal was created which far transcended that lower relationship of antiquity. Greek friendship was to be merged in Christian love.

The meaning of such a change will appear if we remember two characteristics of mere friendship, on which Aristotle dwells. One is that it is necessarily based upon selfishness; springing from a wish to realize oneself in the life of another, fed by the benefit or pleasure derived from the mutual intercourse, it lies under the necessary limitation that we shall not wish for our friend a good which would remove him from us, or an improvement which would raise him too far above us. For the second point is that friendship can only exist between equals, and the best friendship is that between good men who stand upon the same level of virtue. Christian love, on the other hand, springs from a complete abnegation of Self. It seeks nothing: it gives all. So far from laying stress upon the equality of conditions, it is never better pleased than when it can raise another to a position of excellence far surpassing its own, and instead of seeking its highest satisfaction in intercourse with its spiritual peers,—the good, the great, the saintly,—it attains its apotheosis when it is allowed to embrace the weak, the sinful, the fallen, and to lavish all its Divine resources upon those who may never be able to repay it even with gratitude.

It is obvious, then, that friendship is on a lower plane than Christian love, and it marks a great advance in ideal ethics when the lesser star pales in presence of the greater; but it may be urged with truth that friendship still has its place in life, and deserves a more careful attention than it receives. In the individual, as in the race, friendship may be a prelude and a practice of the nobler and wider relation. And there is this further reason for trying to understand the nature of friendship, that it is more than once in the

Bible used as a type and a figure of the relationship which may exist between the soul and its God.

We will proceed then to examine some of the characteristics of friendship referred to in the book of Proverbs.

Friends, according to the original sense of the Hebrew word, are those who delight in one another's companionship; either they are useful to one another because each possesses gifts which the other has not, or they are agreeable to one another because they have certain tastes in common. Thus there may of course be a friendship in evil, in vice, in destructive practices; thieves may enter into a league to carry out their anti-social designs, and may be very true to one another; vicious men may find a bond of friendship in the common indulgence of their vices; and in this way friendship, so called, may be a means of ruining the friends. "There are friends for mutual shattering," just as "there is a lover that cleaves more than a brother."[1] There may also be an interested comradeship which is entirely hypocritical; such a friendship is usually marked by a loud and ostentatious demonstration: "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him."[2] But, in the main, friendship implies a certain amount of goodness; for it is in itself a virtue. The suspicious, malignant nature of evil men speedily snaps the ties which bind them together for a time; and where honour exists among thieves it affords a strong

[1] Prov. xviii. 24. This sense is obtained by what appears a necessary change in the text; we must read יֵשׁ for אִישׁ. A similar error occurs 2 Sam. xiv. 19 and Micah vi. 10.

[2] Prov. xxvii. 14.

presumption that the thieves are the product of a wrong social state, rather than of a naturally evil disposition.

We may then practically, in thinking of friendship, confine our attention to that which exists between well-meaning people, and tends on the whole to bless, to strengthen, and to improve them. We may come to look at some of the uses and the delights of friendship. "As in water face answers to face, so in the heart man answers to man."[1] In the heart of our friend we see our own character reflected just as gazing into a still pool we see the reflection of our own face. It is in the frank and sympathetic intercourse of friendship that we really get to know ourselves, and to realize what is in us. We unfold to one another, we discover our similarities and mark our differences. Points which remained unobserved in our own hearts are immediately detected and understood when we see them also in our friends; faculties which remained unused are brought into play to supplement the discovered defects in our friend's nature. We hardly guess what a fund of happy humour is in us until we are encouraged to display it by observing how its flashes light up the face we love. Our capacities of sympathy and tenderness remain undeveloped until we wish eagerly to comfort our friend in a sudden sorrow. In a true friendship we find that we are living a life which is doubled in all its faculties of enjoyment and of service;[2] we quite shudder to think what cold, apathetic, undeveloped creatures we should have been but for that genial touch which unfolded us, and

[1] Prov. xxvii. 19.

[2] "Sorrows by being communicated grow less and joys greater." —Bacon.

warmed our hearts into genuine feeling while it brought our minds into active play. This intellectual value of friendship is brought out in the happy saying: "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."[1] A friendless person has a lack-lustre face; his talk has a dull edge; his emotions a poor and feeble flow. That delightful readiness of thought and expression which makes all the charm of social intercourse, the easy tact which rubs off the angles and smooths all the relations of life, the bright coruscations which seem like sunlight playing over summer seas, are usually the result of close and intimate communion with congenial friends. Reading may make a learned man, and without hard study few people can accomplish much permanent good in the world, but reading does not necessarily make a really social man, one who brings his fellow-creatures together in happy and helpful relationships; that beautiful faculty is only acquired by the fostering and stimulating influences of heart companionships. When we have real friends, though they be only a few, we diffuse a friendly feeling amongst others, wherever we go. Possibly also in the simile of the iron lies a reminder of the discipline which friendship gives to character, a discipline which is not always unaccompanied by pain. Friends "rub each other's angles down," and sometimes the friction is a little distressing to both sides. The blades are sharpened, by a few imperceptible filings being ground off each of their edges. The use of friendship depends very largely on its frankness, just as its sweetness depends upon

[1] Prov. xxvii. 17.

mutual consideration. When the frankness hurts we have to remind ourselves of the wholesome truth that the soft speaking is not always a token of love, and the hard sayings of our friend may be uttered at a great personal cost, for our good rather than his. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of an enemy are profuse."[1]

If, however, friendship ripens through many years of kindly growth, or if a swift elective affinity forestalls at once the fruit of years, all the pain of mutual counsel and correction disappears, and may be changed into a joy very sweet to the soul. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend that cometh of soul counsel."[2] It is a very beautiful condition of things which is referred to in this proverb. Two people have learnt thoroughly to understand one another, and have become in a certain sense one. Each recognises the service that the other renders, and welcomes the advice or even the rebuke which is made possible by their relationship. The interchange of affection is naturally sweet, but as sweet, or even sometimes sweeter, is the delicate aroma which arises when one sees a fault in the other, and with a tenderness begotten of affection, and a humility which trembles to presume, speaks gently but frankly to his friend. Never do the eyes more eagerly respond to one another, never is the hand-clasp so firm and hearty, as after such a passage between true friends.

But the decisive test and the most beautiful proof of real friendship will be found in the day of adversity. A friend is never known till needed.[3] When calamity

[1] Prov. xxvii. 6. [2] Prov. xxvii. 9.

[3] "Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur."—CICERO.

falls upon us, false friends make excuses and go; lip-friends relapse into silence; but we begin then for the first time to find out who is a friend indeed. Then it appears that the true friend is entirely unchanged by the changed aspect of affairs; it seems as if he had been born into a brotherhood with us for this express occasion. There is no wish to cry off; he seems even to press the brotherly tie in a way which we should not have presumed to expect, and thus he contrives to lighten the oppressive burden of obligation for the favour that he confers on us, by making it appear that he was bound to act as he does by a necessity of kinship. This seems to be the meaning of our text. Such a friend, if he be near at hand and in constant contact with us, is of more service than our own brother;[1] and when through his timely aid or effectual comfort we have come out of the furnace, and our tears are dried, we say constantly to ourselves that we doubt whether our own brother would have clung to us so faithfully, would have borne with our querulous murmurs so patiently, or relieved our necessities so delicately and so liberally.[2]

If you have such a friend as this, your own or your father's, take care to retain him; do not alienate him by negligence or a deficient consideration. Put yourself out of the way to show that you appreciate and value him; do not allow a false reserve or a foolish shyness to check your expression of gratitude. A friendship is a delicate growth; and even when it has become robust, it can easily be blighted. The results of years may be lost in a few days. And if a root of

[1] Prov. xxvii. 10. [2] Prov. xviii. 24.

bitterness springs up, if a division occurs, it may be quite impossible by every effort in your power to heal the breach or to pluck up that obstinate root. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and such contentions are like the bars of a castle."[1] The closer the intimacy had been, the tenderer the friendship, so much the sterner will be these bars, so much the more inexpugnable the castle. For it will be felt, if such protestations, such interchange of affection, such mutual delights, could have been deceptive, mere hypocrisies or delusions, what hope can there be that the same things broken and patched up again can be of any worth? A difference with a chance acquaintance is easily removed; further knowledge may improve our opinion of one another, and even if we separate we have no deep resentment. But a difference between true friends may quickly become irreparable. They feel that there is no more to know; they have seen the best and that has proved disappointing. The resentment springs from a sense of abused confidence and injured love.

If you have real friends then, take pains to keep them. Watch carefully for the small beginnings of a rupture and hasten to heal it. Think no effort is wasted, and no apology or explanation is too humiliating, which may avert that great calamity,—the loss of a true soul-comrade; one whom you have learnt to honour with the name and dignity of friend.

"The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,"

says our wise poet,

"Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel."

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[1] Prov. xviii. 19.

Such a friendship as we have been considering, rare and beautiful as it is, forms a noble stepping-stone to the loftier relationship of Christian love. In tone and quality it is almost the same; it differs only in its range and in its motive. What one man feels to another in an ideal friendship, the Christian is called upon, according to his capacity and opportunity, to feel to man as man, to all his fellow-creatures. We cannot of course fulfil all the offices of friendship to every one, and we are not as Christians required to abate one jot of our love to those who are our friends by affinity and by choice. But where the heart is truly Christian it will become more expansive, and it will be conscious of the powerful claims which weakness, misery, solitude, or even moral failings, make upon its friendship; it will shrink from the selfishness inherent in all affections which are merely selective and exclusive; it will earnestly desire to feel an affection which is inclusive and quite unselfish. Where is to be found the motive for such an enlarged spirit of friendship? Whence is to come the impulse to such a self-surrender?

Surely such a motive and such an impulse are to be discovered only in that relation of friendship which God Himself deigns to sustain towards the human soul. Jehoshaphat in his prayer appeals to God on the ground that He had given the land to "Abraham His friend for ever."[1] And we read of Moses that "the Lord spake unto him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."[2] But in this position of one who is called the father of the faithful, and of one who was the leader of his people, we cannot but

[1] 2 Chron. xx. 7. [2] Exod. xxxiii. 11

recognise a promise and a foreshadowing of a relation with God which was meant to become more general. The whole tendency of the Gospel is to put every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ on a spiritual level with the most favoured and richly endowed of a former dispensation. And since the Incarnate Son lived on earth, and called the simple peasants of Galilee to be, not His servants, but His friends, if they did whatsoever He commanded them,[1] we may without presumption—nay, we must if we would not grieve Him by unbelief—accept the mysteriously dignified position of God's friends. The feeblest and the poorest, as well as the strongest and most gifted, believing in Jesus Christ, in proportion as he heartily accepts the authority and obeys the commandment of his Lord, is a friend of God. It is a very unequal friendship, as we must all feel. He has all the strength, all the wisdom, all the goodness, all the gifts; but the sense of inequality is removed by His own gracious friendliness: He attaches such importance to a heartfelt love that He is willing to accept that as the fair equivalent of all that He does and gives to us; and He remedies the terrible inferiority of His friends by realizing His own life in them and merging their imperfection in His perfectness, their limitations in His infinity.

Now, shall we venture to assume that you and God are friends; that the beautiful relation which we have examined, the delight in mutual companionship, the interchange of thought and feeling, the quick and quickening response of love and comprehension, exist between you and Him? Come and read some of these

[1] John xv. 14.

sayings again and apply them to Him. You may gaze into the heart of God, and as face answers to face in a quiet pool, you may find yourself in Him,—a larger self, a truer self, a holier self, than you could ever find in any human fellowship, or than you had ever dared to imagine. This familiar intercourse with God, which has its roots in a profound reverence and its fruits in an unutterable joy, is the new creation of a human soul. A man will be known by his friends, and most assuredly he will be known, if his Friend and most constant Companion is God. He will regard that status as his highest title and distinction, just as Lord Brooks was so proud of knowing Sir Philip Sydney that he wished his epitaph to be "Here lies Sir Philip Sydney's friend."

Again, in this close fellowship with God, in His warnings and encouragements and chastisements, even in the "faithful wounds" that He inflicts, does not the heart perceive His sweetness as an ointment and perfume? Does not the quiet place where these passages of tender friendship between your soul and God occur become redolent with a precious fragrance, as of incense or of fresh flowers?

And then the deep meaning which the friendship of God brings into our text, "A friend loveth at all times, and as a brother"—yes, our Divine Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ—"is born for adversity;" or into that other saying, "There is a lover that cleaves more than a brother"! Let us have no loud pharisaical ways in blessing our Friend,[1] but let no effort seem too exacting to retain unbroken this priceless blessing of the Divine Communion!

[1] Prov. xxvii. 14.

Now, where the soul counts God its nearest and dearest Friend,—the Friend of whom nothing in life or death can rob it,—this effect follows by a beautiful necessity: the chief and all-inclusive friendship being secured, we are at leisure from ourselves to soothe and sympathise, we are able to extend our thoughts and our ministries of love to all around us, and to reflect in our relations with men that exquisite relation which God has deigned to establish with us. Our own private friendships then produce no exclusiveness, but rather they become the types of our feelings to others, and the ever-springing fountainhead of friendly thoughts and courteous deeds; while these private friendships and our wider relations alike are all brought up into the lofty and purifying friendship which we hold with our God and He with us.

XVIII.

THE EVIL OF ISOLATION.

'He that separates himself follows after his own desire, but against all sound wisdom he shows his teeth."—PROV. xviii. 1.

FROM the value of friendship there is a natural and easy transition to the evil of isolation. We must try to fathom the profound meaning which is hidden under this simple but striking proverb. To begin with, what are we to understand by "one that separates himself"? This same word occurs in 2 Sam. i. 23 concerning Saul and Jonathan, that "in their death they were not separated." Theirs was a togetherness which accompanied them to the grave. On the other hand, there are people who shun all togetherness in their lives, — they are voluntarily, deliberately separated from their kind, and they seem for the first time to blend with their fellows when their undistinguished dust mixes with the dust of others in the common grave. We are to think of a person who has no ties with any of his fellow-creatures, who has broken such ties as bound him to them, or is of that morbid and unnatural humour that makes all intercourse with others distasteful. We are to think more especially of one who chooses this life of solitariness in order to follow out his own desire rather than from any necessity

of circumstance or disposition; one who finds his pleasure in ignoring mankind, and wishes for intercourse with them only that he may vent his spleen against them; in a word, we are to think of a Misanthrope.

We must be careful in catching the precise idea, because there are men who shut themselves off from their kind, rightly or wrongly, in order to seek the common welfare. A student or an inventor, sometimes even a teacher or a preacher, will find the solitude of the study or the laboratory the only condition on which he can accomplish the work to which he is called. The loss of domestic life or of social pleasures, the withdrawal from all the "kindly ways of men," may be a positive pain to him, a cross which he bears for the direct good of those whose company he forswears, or for the cause of Truth, in whose service alone it is possible to permanently benefit his fellows. Such a "separation" as this—painful, difficult, unrewarded—we must exclude from the intention of our text, although possibly our text might convey a warning even to these benevolent eremites, that unless the heart is kept warm by human sympathies, unless the mind is kept in touch with the common cares and joys of our kind, the value of even intellectual work will be considerably diminished, while the worker himself must inevitably and perhaps needlessly suffer. But, on the whole, we must except these nobler instances of isolation, if we would feel the full force of the judgment which is pronounced in the text.

The misanthrope is one who has no faith in his fellows, and shrinks into himself to escape them; who pursues his own private ends, avoiding all unnecessary

speech with those who are around him, living alone, dying unobserved, except for the mischief which consciously or unconsciously he does to those who survive him. Such an one is aptly described as showing his teeth[1] in an angry snarl against all the approaches of a true wisdom.

Shakespeare might have had this proverb before him in that grim delineation of Richard the Third, who boasts that he has neither pity, love, nor fear. He was, he had been told, born with teeth in his mouth.

> "And so I was," he exclaims; "which plainly signified
> That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog."

And then he explains his terrible character in these significant lines:—

> "I have no brother, I am like no brother:
> And this word Love, which greybeards call divine,
> Be resident in *men like one another*,
> And not in me; *I am myself alone*."[2]

Yes, Love can only exist among men who are like one another; and no more damning indictment can be brought against a human being than this, that he is *himself alone*.

The truth is that every man is not only a "self," a personality, but he is a very complex being made up of many relations with other men. He is a son, a brother, a friend, a father, a citizen. Suppose him to be stripped of all sonship, brotherhood, friendship, fatherhood, and citizenship; there is left, not a *man*, but a mere *self*, and that is his hideous condemnation.

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[1] See note on חַחֲנֵלָע in Lecture XV., p. 205.

[2] *III. King Henry VI.*, Act v., Sc. 6.

In the same way, a woman that is neither daughter, nor sister, nor wife, nor friend, nor ministrant, does not deserve the grand name of woman; she is a mere *self*, a point of exigent and querulous desires. The most appalling discovery in a great city is that multitudes have become mere *selves*,—hungry, hollow, ravening, thirsty, shrivelled selves. The father and mother are dead, or left far away, probably never known; no one is brother to them, they are brothers to no one. Friend has no significance to their understanding, or means only one who, from most interested motives, ministers to their craving appetites; they are not citizens of London, nor of any other city; they are not Englishmen, though they were born in England, nor have they any other nationality,—hideous, clamorous, esurient selves, nothing more. An old Greek saying declared that one who lives alone is either a god or a wild beast;[1] while, as we have already seen, there are a few of the isolated ones who are isolated from noble and even Divine motives, the vast majority are in this condition because they have fallen from the level of humanity into the roving and predatory state of wild animals, that seek their meat by night and lurk in a lonely lair by day.

The "sound wisdom" against which the isolated rage is nothing less than the kindly law which makes us men, and ordains that we should not live to ourselves alone, but should fulfil our noble part as members one of another. The Social Instinct is one of two or three striking characteristics which mark us out as human: a man by himself is only an animal, and a

[1] ἢ θεὸς ἢ θήριον.

very poor animal too; in size he is far beneath the greatest of the creatures that inhabit land and sea; he is not as swift as the winged denizens of the air; his strength in proportion to his bulk is debility compared with that of the tiniest insects. His distinction in the creation, and his excelling dignity, are derived from the social relations which make him in combination strong, in the intercourse of speech and thought, wise, and in the loving response of heart to heart, noble. If by some unhappy accident a human being wanders early from his place into the forests, is suckled by wild beasts, and grows up among them, the result is an animal inconceivably repulsive, fierce, cunning, and ugly; vulpine, but without the wolf's agile grace; bearish, but without the bear's slow-pacing dignity.

The "sound wisdom" is the wisdom of the Creator, who from the beginning determined that it is not good for men to live alone, and marked His conception of the unity which should bind them together by the gift of the woman to the man, to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

It becomes therefore a necessity to every wise human being to recognise, to maintain, and to cultivate all those wholesome relationships which make us truly human. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place."[1] Sometimes when a great ship is far off in mid-ocean, a tired land-bird will fall panting and exhausted upon the deck: the wings can beat no longer; the eyes glaze; and the eager wanderer fails and dies. The true bird-life is the life of the woods, of the

[1] Prov. xxvii. 8.

toilsomely-woven nest, of the mate and the brood and the fledglings. In the same way on those ocean steamers—ay, and in many a weary bye-path and lonely desert of the earth—may be found men who have broken away from the ties which formed their strength and their truer being, and now fall, faint and purposeless, to languish and to die. For true human life is the life of our fellows, of the diligent laborious housebuilding, of the home, of the young, of the rising nestlings which are to form the next link in the long chain of the generations.

Neighbourliness is the larger part of life; we are not to go to our distant "brother's house in the day of our calamity, for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off."[1] Our life is rich and true and helpful just in proportion as we are entwined with those who live around us in bonds of mutual respect and consideration, of reciprocal helpfulness and service, of intimate and intelligent friendship.

It is hardly necessary to say that there is neighbourliness *and* neighbourliness. Our relation to our neighbours may be that of mere busybodies, tattlers, and whisperers; it may be devoid of tact and consideration: there is need therefore of a warning to "hold back thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be sated with thee, and hate thee."[2] But this possible abuse does not affect the broad and salutary principle: we are meant to live in one another; our nature can realize itself, and accomplish its mission, only in generous and noble relations with those who are about us. The home is at the foundation of all;

[1] Prov. xxvii. 10. [2] Prov. xxv. 17.

a good son or daughter will generally make a good man or woman; good brothers will prove good citizens, good sisters good ministrants and teachers to the poor and the ignorant; good fathers will be the best rulers in Church and State. The home will be the preparation for the larger life of the town, or the social circle, or the state. And thus from the cradle to the grave no man should live alone, but every one should be a member of a larger body, holding a definite place in a system or organism, depending on others, with others depending on him. Nerves should run through the body politic, motor nerves and sensory nerves; the joys and pains of a community should be shared, the activities of a community should be united. No one should live to himself; all should live, and rejoice to live, in the great co-operative society of the world, in which personal interests are mutual interests and the gains of each are the gains of all.

But we can hardly probe to the depths of this Proverbial Philosophy without becoming aware that we are touching on an idea which is the mainspring of Christianity on its earthly and visible side. We seem to have detected in all the preceding discussion echoes, however faint, of the Apostolic teaching which gave practical shape and body to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The relation of Christ, as the Son of God, to the human race as a whole, immediately opened up the possibility of a world-wide society in which all nations, all classes, all castes, all degrees, all individualities, should be not so much merged as distinctly articulated and recognised in a complete and complex whole. The kingdom of heaven, while borrowing

its terminology from earthly kingdoms, was unlike any one of them because it was to include them all. Into that kingdom all the peoples, nations, and languages should pass.

The Catholic Church, as the first attempt to realize this grand idea, presented for a time a certain faint and wavering reflection of the image in the heavens. The fault of seeking the unity of the race in a priesthood instead of in the people was of course a fatal one to its own ultimate success, but at least one great service was rendered to humanity; the idea became familiar of a Unity, in which the narrower unities of the family, the social circle, and the nation were to find their completion. And when the intelligence and the faith of men broke with the Catholic Church, it was not a breach with the Catholic idea, but merely a transition to a nobler and a more living realization of the idea. At present the idea is daily clearing and assuming vaster proportions; humanity is seen to be one; the Great Father presides over a family which may be sundered, but cannot be really parted; over a race which is divided, but not actually separated.

Strange and rapturous have been the emotions of men as they have entered into the realization of this idea, and the thrill of their vast fellowship has passed through their hearts. Sometimes they have turned away in bitterness of revolt from the Christian Church, which with harsh dogmatisms and fierce anathemas, with cruel exclusiveness and sectarian narrowness, seems rather to check than to further the sublime thought of the One Father, of whom all the family is named in heaven and in earth. But whatever justification there may be for complaint against the Church,

we cannot afford to turn our thoughts from the Son of Man, who has redeemed the race to which we belong, and who, as the Divine Power, is alone able to carry out in effect the great conception which He has given us in thought.

And now I am going to ask you for a moment to consider how the text reads in the light of the work and the presence and the person of Jesus Christ, who has come to gather together in one those that are scattered abroad.

The person of Christ is the link which binds all men together; the presence of Christ is the guarantee of the union; the work of Christ, which consists in the removal of sin, is the main condition of a heart-unity for all mankind. When therefore you put your trust in Christ and your sinful nature is subdued, you are incorporated into a body of which He is the head, and you must pass out of the narrow self-life into the broad Christ-life; you can no longer live for yourself alone, because as the member of a body you exist only in relation to all the other members. "But," it is said, "am I not to seek my own salvation, and then to work it out with fear and trembling? am I not to withdraw from the world, and to labour hard to make my calling and election sure?" In a certain sense, the answer to that question is, Yes. But then it is only in a certain sense; for you make sure of your own salvation precisely in proportion as you are really incorporated into Christ, and are made a genuine member of the body: as St. John says, "We know that we are passed from death unto life *because we love the brethren*," and "if we walk in the light we *have fellowship one with another*, and the blood of Jesus Christ

cleanseth us from all sin." We work out our salvation therefore only by losing the self in others; we withdraw from the world and make our calling sure, just as our thoughts become identified with God's thoughts, and as our lives are passed in cheerful and victorious service.

If, then, on the ground of our humanity we are cautioned against separating ourselves, because by so doing we set our teeth against all sound wisdom, on the ground of our Christianity we must be warned not to separate ourselves, because that means to harden our hearts against the faith itself. When we say to ourselves, "We will live our Christian life alone," that is equivalent to saying, "We will not live the Christian life at all." We do not know what the life in heaven may be, — though from the casual glimpses we obtain of it, we should say that it is a great social gathering, at which we shall sit down with Abraham and all the saints of God, a kind of marriage festivity to celebrate the union of the Lord with His bride,—but it is plain that the Christian life, as it is revealed to us here, *must be the life of a community*, for it is likened to a vine, from which all dead branches are cut off, and plainly all cut-off branches are dead.

"But," say many people amongst us, "we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; we trust to Him; why should you impose any further conditions?" Do they put their faith in Him? Does not faith imply obedience? Did He not require His disciples to be united in a fellowship, and did He not give His body and His blood as a symbol of this fellowship, and command them to take the symbols in remembrance of Him until He comes? Are these isolated believers obeying Him, or are they not cutting at the root of His glorious

purpose of human fellowship in the Divine Head? And if they are thus breaking His expressed commandment, has He not warned them that He will say, "I never knew you, depart from Me," although they have taught in His name, and even cast out devils and done many wonderful works?

And in thus reminding you of our Lord's thought, I am not speaking only of what we call the fellowship of the Church; for there are many who are merely nominal members of the Church, and though their names are enrolled they "separate themselves" and live the life of unhallowed isolation, just as they did before they professedly entered into the Christian society. This is a larger question than that of Church membership; Church membership derives its vast importance from being a part of this larger question. Will you, therefore, let me close with a personal appeal addressed to each one of you?

You know that the Son of Man would make men one; you know that He calls His disciples into a holy family of mutual love and service, so that men may know that they are His, and may recognise Him because they love one another. Are you venturing to disregard His commandment and to frustrate His will by separating yourself for your own desire? have you fallen out of all relations with His family, so that the sonship, the brotherhood, the friendship, the fatherhood, the citizenship, of the heavenly kingdom are as good as meaningless to you? If so, may I say in the words of the text, you are setting "your teeth against all sound wisdom"?

XIX.

HUMAN FREEDOM.

"The foolishness of man subverteth his way;
And his heart fretteth against the Lord."—Prov. xix. 3.

THERE is such a valuable expansion and commentary on this proverb in the book of Ecclesiasticus that it seems worth while to quote it in full: "Say not, it is through the Lord that I fell away, for the things He hates thou shalt not do. Say not, it is He that caused me to err, for He has no use for a sinful man. Every abomination the Lord hates, neither is it lovely to those that fear Him. He Himself at the outset made Man, and left him in the power of his own control, that, if thou wilt, thou shouldst keep His commandments, and to do faithfully what is pleasing to Him. He set fire and water before thee, that thou shouldst stretch out thy hand to which thou wilt. In front of men is life and death, and whichever a man pleases shall be given to him. Because wide is the wisdom of the Lord; He is mighty in power, beholding all things; and His eyes are upon them that fear Him, and He Himself will take note of every work of man. He never enjoined any one to do wickedly, and He never gave to any one licence to sin."[1]

It is our constant tendency to claim whatever good

[1] Eccles. xv. 11-20.

we do as our own doing, and to charge whatever evil we do on causes which are beyond our control,—on heredity, on circumstances of our birth and upbringing, or even on God. The Scriptures, on the other hand, regard all our good deeds as the work which God works within us, when our will is given to Him, while all our evil is ascribed to our own foolish and corrupt will, for which we are, and shall be, held responsible. This is certainly a very remarkable contrast, and we shall do well to take account of it. It is not necessary to run into any extreme statement, to deny the effects either of taints in the blood which we receive from our parents, or of early surroundings and education, or even the enormous influence which other people exercise over us in later life; but when all allowance is made for these recognised facts, the contention of the text is that what really subverts our lives is our own folly,—and not uncontrollable circumstances,—and our folly is due, not to our misfortune, but to our fault.

Now we will not attempt to deal with all the modifications and reservations and refinements which ingenuity might offer to this doctrine; however charity may require us to make allowance for others on the ground of disadvantages, it is questionable whether we help them, and it is certain that we weaken ourselves, by turning attention constantly from the central fact to the surrounding circumstances; we will therefore try to steadily look at this truth of Individual Responsibility, and lay it to heart. When we have acquitted ourselves of blame, and have obtained a discharge in the forum of our own conscience, it will be time to seek other causes of our guilt, and to "fret against the Lord."

But before we turn inwards and appeal to our own consciousness, may we not observe how absurd it is that the Lord should be charged with responsibility for our sins? What do we know of the Lord except that He hates and abominates sin? It is as the Hater of sin that He is revealed to us in ever-clearer forms from the first page of revelation to the last. But more, the most powerful proof that we possess of His existence is to be found in the voice of conscience within us; we instinctively identify Him with that stern monitor that denounces so vigorously and unsparingly all our offences against holiness. The God of revelation is from the first declared to be "He who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." The God of conscience is by the very nature of the case identified with the uncompromising sentence against evil; is it not then obviously inconsistent to lay our sins to the charge of God? We are more assured of His Holiness than of His omnipotence; we cannot therefore bring His omnipotence to impeach His holiness. We see Him as the Avenger of sin before we see Him in any other capacity; we cannot therefore bring any subsequent vision of Him to discredit the first. It is surely the dictate of plain common sense, as St. James says, that "God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death."[1]

Now our actual responsibility for our own sins, and

[1] James i. 13-15.

the troubles which result from them, will perhaps come out in the clear light of conscience, if we regard our conduct in the following way. We must make an appeal to consciousness. There are actions which, consciousness tells us, rest entirely on our own choice, and concerning which no sophistry, however ingenious, can furnish an adequate exculpation. There was in these cases, as we well remember, the plain offer of an alternative "Fire or Water, Life or Death." We knew at the time that we were equally able to take either of them; we felt no compulsion; there was, it is true, a great tumult of conflicting motives, but when the motives were balanced and the resulting verdict was declared, we were perfectly conscious that we could, if we chose, reverse the verdict and give our judgment against it. Our first deviations from truth, from purity, from charity, come up before us as we reflect; the struggle which went on survives vividly in memory; and when we yielded to the evil power we were conscious at the time, as we remember still, that our will was to blame. As the lie glided from the lips, as the unhallowed thought was allowed to pass into act, as the rein was thrown on the neck of the evil passion, we knew that we were doing wrong, we felt that by an adequate exercise of the will we could do right. Cast your eye back on the steps by which your character was formed, on the gradual destruction of your finer feelings, on the steady decline of your spiritual instincts, on the slow deadening and searing of your moral sense. Do you not remember how deliberately you submitted to the fascinations of that dangerous friend, whom your conscience entirely disapproved? how wilfully you opened and perused the pages of

that foul book, which swept over your soul like a mud-torrent and left its slimy sediment there ever after? how you consciously avoided the influence of good people, made every excuse to escape the prayer, the reading, the sermon, which was to you a conscience-stirring influence, an appeal of God to the soul?

As you retrace those fatal steps, you will be surprised to discover how entirely your own master you were at the time, although the evil deeds done then have forged a chain which limits your freedom now. If at any of those critical moments some one had said to you, Are you free to do just which of the two things you please? you would have replied at once, Why, of course I am. Indeed, if there had been any compulsion to evil, you would have rebelled against it and resisted it. It was really the complete liberty, the sense of power, the delight in following your own desire, that determined your choice. The evil companion persuaded, your conscience dissuaded, neither compelled; when the balance hung even you threw the weight of your will into the scale. The book lay open; curiosity, prurience, impurity, bade you read; your best conviction shamed you and called you away: when the two forces pulled even, you deliberately gave *your* support to the evil force. The solemn voice of prayer and worship called you, moving you with mystical power, waking strange desires and hopes and aspirations; the half-mocking voice of the earth was also in your ear, tempting, luring, exciting, and when the sounds were about balanced, you raised up your own voice for the one and gave it the predominance.

Or if now in the bondage of evil you can no longer realize that you were once free, you can look at

others who are now where you were then; notice even when you try to tempt your younger companions into evil, how the blush of shame, the furtive glance, the sudden collapse of resistance, plainly proves that the action is one consciously determined by an evil choice; notice how your first blasphemies, your first devil-born doubts, suggestions, and innuendoes, bring the pained expression to the face, and raise a conflict which the will has to decide. In this appeal to consciousness or to observation we must be scrupulously honest with ourselves; we must take infinite pains not to garble the evidence to suit a foregone conclusion or to excuse an accomplished fall. I think we may say that when men are honest with themselves, and in proportion as they are pure and innocent, and not yet bound hand and foot by the bondage of their own sins, they know that they have been free, that in the face of all circumstances they still stood uncommitted; that if they yielded to temptation it was their own "foolishness that subverted their way."

But now we may pass from these inward moral decisions which have determined our character and made us what we are, to the ordinary actions which form the greater part of our everyday conduct. Here again we are generally inclined to take credit for every course which has a happy issue, and for every unfortunate decision to cast the blame on others. We are reminded, however, that our misfortunes are generally the result of our own folly; we are too impatient, too hasty, too impetuous, too self-willed. "Desire without knowledge is not good, and he that hasteth with his feet misseth the way."[1] If we look back upon our mistakes

[1] Prov. xix. 2.

in life, it is surprising to see how many were due to our own headstrong determination to follow our own way, and our complete disregard of the prudent counsels which our wiser friends ventured to offer us. "The way of the foolish is right in his own eyes: but he that is wise hearkeneth unto counsel."[1] "Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."[2] "Hear counsel," is the command of this chapter, "and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end."[3] "Every purpose is established by counsel,"—affairs of state, whether civil[4] or military,[5]—and so by counsel a man is made strong and is able to carry out the warfare of his own personal life.[6] It is well for us therefore not only to accept counsel which is proffered to us, but to be at pains to get it, for it often lies, like the waters of a well, deep down in a man's mind, and requires some patience and skill in order to elicit it.[7]

Our false steps are due to a rash precipitancy which prevents us from looking at the question on all its sides, and learning the views of those who have had experience and know. The calamities which befell us were foreseen by many onlookers, and were even foretold by our friends, but we could accept no advice, no warning. And while therefore it is perfectly true that our own judgment was not sufficient to ward off the evil or prevent the *faux pas*, we are none the less to blame, our own foolishness has none the less subverted our

[1] Prov. xii. 15.
[2] Prov. xv. 22.
[3] Prov. xix. 20.
[4] Prov. xi. 14.
[5] Prov. xx. 18.
[6] Prov. xxiv. 5, 6.
[7] Prov. xx. 5.

way, for it was our own fault that we refused to be advised, it was our own incredible folly that made us form so wrong an idea of our wisdom.

Suppose then that in our retrospect of life and in the estimation of our errors, we mark off all those sins for which our conscience duly charges us with direct responsibility, and all those blunders which might have been avoided if we had wisely submitted to more prudent judgments than our own, what is there that remains? Can we point out any group of actions or any kind of errors which are yet unaccounted for, and may possibly be charged on some other person or thing than ourselves? Is there yet some opening by which we may escape responsibility? Are there any effectual and valid excuses that we can successfully urge?

Now it appears that all these possible excuses are netted and completely removed—and every avenue of escape is finally blocked—by this broad consideration; God is at hand as the wisest of Counsellors, and we might by simple appeal to Him, and by reverently obeying His commandments, avoid all the evils and the dangers to which we are exposed. So far from being able to excuse ourselves and to lay the blame on God, it is our chief and all-inclusive fault, it is the clearest mark of our foolishness, that we do not resort to Him for help, but constantly ollow our own devices; that we do not rely upon His goodness, but idly fret against Him and all His ordinances. "There are many devices in a man's heart," but over against these feeble, fluctuating, and inconsistent ideas of ours is "the counsel of the Lord, which shall stand."[1] "The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide

[1] Prov. xix. 21.

satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil."[1] There is a way of life, there is a plain commandment, a law of God's appointing: "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul: but he that is careless of his ways shall die."[2] It is simply our own carelessness that is our ruin; if we would pay the slightest heed, if there were one grain of seriousness in us, we should be wise, we should get understanding, and so find good in the salvation of the soul;[3] we should not, as we so often do, "hear instruction, only to err from the words of knowledge."[4]

We may wonder at the strong conviction with which this truth was urged even under the Jewish law; it may seem to us that the requirements then were so great, and the details so numerous, and the revelation so uncertain, that a man could scarcely be held responsible if he missed the way of life through inadvertence or defective knowledge. Yet even then the path was plain, and if a man missed it he had but himself and his own folly to blame. But how much more plain and sure is everything made for us! Our Lord has not only declared the way, but He is the Way; He has not only given us a commandment to keep, but He has Himself kept it, and offers to the believing soul the powers of an inward life, by which the yoke of obedience becomes easy, and the burden of service is made light. He has become "the end of the law to every one that believeth." He has made His offer of Himself not only general, but universal, so that no human being can say that he is excluded, or murmur that he is not able to "keep his soul." His word is gone out into all the world, and

[1] Prov. xix. 23. [2] Prov. xix. 16. [3] Prov. xix. 8. [4] Prov. xix. 27.

while they who have not heard it, being without a law are yet a law unto themselves, and are responsible by virtue of that self-witness which God has given everywhere in Nature, in Society, and in the conscience of man, how can we sufficiently emphasize our own responsibility, to whom God has spoken in the latter days by His own Son! Surely "whoso despiseth the word bringeth destruction on himself." [1]

If even in that old and darker dispensation the light was so clear that it was chargeable to a man's own folly when he disobeyed,—and "judgments were prepared for scorners, and stripes for the backs of fools," [2] —what must come upon us who have the clearer light if we wilfully and foolishly disobey? The counsel of the Lord stands sure: "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." [3] No authority of wise men, no sneers of wits, no devices of the clever, can in the least avail to set aside His mighty ordinance or to excuse us for disregarding it. "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but victory is of the Lord." [4] There can be no evasion, no escape. He Himself, by His own invincible power, will bring home to the hearts of the rebellious the evil of their rebellion, and will send the cruel messenger against them.[5]

Does it not behove us to remember and to consider? to remember our offences, to consider our guilt and the Lord's power? Here is a way of life marked out before you, and there is the way of death; here is the water held out to you, and there is the fire; and you

[1] Prov. xiii. 13.
[2] Prov. xix. 29.
[3] Prov. xxi. 30.
[4] Prov. xxi. 31.
[5] Prov. xvii. 11.

may choose. The way of life is in the Gospel of God's dear Son; you know that its precepts are perfect, converting the soul, and that Christ Himself is holy, such an one as the earth never bore before or since; you know too that this Holy One came to give His life a ransom for many, that He invited all to come unto Him, and promised to all who came everlasting life. You know that He did give His life a ransom,—as the Good Shepherd He gave Himself for the sheep, and then took again the life which He laid down. You know that He ever liveth to make intercession for us, and that His saving power was not exercised for the last time years and years ago, but this very day, probably just at the moment that I am now speaking to you. The way is plain, and the choice is free; the truth shines, and you can open your eyes to it; the life is offered, and you can accept it. What pretext can you give for not choosing Christ, for not coming to the truth, for not accepting the life?

Is it not clear to you that if you refuse Him that speaketh, and your way is thus subverted,—as indeed it must be,—it is your own folly that is to blame? You fret against the Lord now, and you charge Him foolishly, but some day you will see clearly that this is all a blind and a subterfuge; you will admit that the choice was open to you, and you chose amiss; that life and death were offered to you, and you preferred death.

If any question might be entertained about those who have only the light of conscience to guide them, and have not heard of the direct relation of succour and support which God is ready to give to those who depend upon Him, there can be no doubt of the complete freedom of every human being, who hears the

message of the Gospel, to accept it. You may put it aside, you may decline to accept it on the ground of disinclination, or because you consider the historical evidence insufficient, but you will be the first to admit that in doing so you exercise your discretion and consciously choose the course which you take.

Nay, leaving all metaphysical discussion about the freedom of the will, I put it to you simply, Can you not, if you choose, come to Christ now?

Oh, hear counsel and receive instruction: is not the Spirit pleading with you, counselling, teaching, warning you? Do not harden your heart, do not turn away. Attend to Christ now, admit Him now, that you may be wise in your latter end.[1]

[1] Prov. xix. 20.

XX.

IDLENESS.

"After the autumn gathering the slothful does not plough; he asks in the harvest, and there is nothing."—PROV. xx. 4.

WE have already in the sixth lecture caught a glimpse of the sluggard, and in the ninth we have seen in passing that diligence in work is enjoined by the teacher; but we must give a more concentrated attention to this subject if we would realize the stress which this book of Wisdom lays on work as the grand condition of life in this earnest world. They who will not work have no place in an order of things which is maintained by work, and in which the toil itself is the great discipline of character and the preparation of joy. It is no churlish or envious spirit which pronounces a doom on the idle, but it is the very necessity of the case; that idleness which in moments of excessive strain we so eagerly covet is, if it is accepted as the regular and continuous state of the soul, a more ruinous and miserable curse than the hardest labour. By a law which we all break at our peril, we are required to have an honest end and a strenuous occupation in our life; and we are further required to labour diligently for the end, and to spare no pains to achieve it. We have many faculties lying

dormant, and we must wake them into activity; we have many gifts half used or not used at all; we must turn them all to account, if we would be wholesome, happy, and in the true sense successful.

First of all, let us look at the portrait of the sluggard as it is delineated in some of these proverbial sayings. We see him in bed, at the board, in the house, out of doors. He will not get up in the morning; he turns from side to side, just like a door which swings backwards and forwards on its hinges, but of course never gets any further.[1] "Yet a little sleep," he says, "a little slumber, a little folding of the hands in sleep."[2] Or when at last he has brought himself to get up and to sit down to table, he is too lethargic even to eat: "He buries his hand in the dish, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again;"[3] or if he raises the morsel to his lips, he does it with an air of indescribable languor and weariness.[4] Then the time comes for him to go out to his daily duties. But he has a number of ingenious, though utterly absurd, excuses why he should not leave the house: "There is a lion in the streets," he says, "a lion in the way;"[5] "There is a lion without; I shall be murdered in the streets."[6] When he is told that this is a delusion, he is prepared to argue the matter, and to show that his fear is well grounded; he is quite scornful of all the people who assure him to the contrary, because they have been out and seen for themselves: "The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men that can render a reason."[7] And when at length he is launched

[1] Prov. xxvi. 14.
[2] Prov. xxiv. 34.
[3] Prov. xix. 24.
[4] Prov. xxvi. 15.
[5] Prov. xxvi. 13.
[6] Prov xxii. 13.
[7] Prov. xxvi. 16.

on the business of the day, arriving late, his wits gone wool-gathering, his will as inactive as his mind is inattentive, he drags through every duty with the air of one who is walking "through a hedge of thorns."[1] Where another person would proceed with easy alacrity, he seems held back by invisible obstacles; his garments are always getting caught in the briars; there is not impetus enough to carry him over the slightest difficulty; and after frequent and somnolent pauses, the end of the day finds him more weary than the busiest, though he has nothing to show but futile efforts and abortive results.

That is a complete picture of the sluggard. We do not of course see him fully developed very often; but we recognise at once the several tendencies in our own characters—the slothfulness, the listlessness, the idle procrastination, the inertia—which may, if unresisted and unconquered, gradually bring us nearer to this finished portrait.

The result of this sluggishness must now be sketched. "Love not sleep," we are told, "lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread."[2] The means of subsistence in this world are the result of labour; toilers win them from the reluctant earth and sea; the only condition on which we can partake in them is that we should toil, either directly in producing the means of subsistence, or indirectly in doing for the producers helpful service for which they are willing to exchange the fruits of their labour. One who sleeps away the golden hours of work, cast by slothfulness into a deep

[1] Prov. xv. 19. [2] Prov. xx. 13.

sleep, has no claim whatever on the earth or the community for daily food; he shall suffer hunger.[1] And if by craft or chance he is able to get his bread without any service rendered to the workers, he shall suffer from a soul-hunger more terrible than starvation—the unutterable ennui, weariness, disgust, and self-loathing which an idle and useless life inevitably produces.

As the text reminds us, there is an alternation of seasons. There is a time to plough, when the earth has yielded her full autumn fruits; there is a time to sow; there is a harvest. If a man is too lazy to plough at the right time and to sow at the right time, his fields will of course give him no crops: "Slothfulness catcheth not his prey."[2] Nor must we think that God in any grudging spirit has ordered this law of the seasons The appetite which forces us to labour, because "our mouth craves it of us,"[3] the apparent rigour with which nature requires us to be up betimes and not to let the opportunity slip, and the threat of poverty which hangs over our heads if we neglect her requirements, are all parts of a beneficent law,—the law that by work itself our life is sweetened and our spirit is developed. They are not to be congratulated who, escaping the spur of appetite, and liberated by the toil of others from the rigorous edicts of nature which require the laborious ploughing and sowing, are enabled to eat the bread of idleness. The hardest worker, worn to the bone and ill-remunerated, is really more enviable than they. The abundance of food is a poor equivalent for the loss of discipline which the

[1] Prov. xix. 15. [2] Prov. xii. 27. [3] Prov. xvi. 26.

desire of food was designed to exact through honest and earnest work. Men come to us and say in effect, "Behold after the autumn gathering we did not plough, and we asked in harvest, and got all that our hearts desired," and we are constrained to pity rather than to congratulate them. It is not good for men to slip through the laws of God and nature thus, for their chastisement is heavier in the end than in the beginning.

The truth of this appears when we remember that a worse result of slothfulness than poverty is the spiritual rust, decay, and degradation which slothfulness itself implies: "The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour;"[1] "He also that is slack in his work is brother to him that is a destroyer."[2] It is indeed a strange illusion which makes man desire idleness. Idleness is ruin; the soul rusts away like the sword in *Hudibras*, which—

> ". . . ate into itself, for lack
> Of something else to hew and hack."

It is death, it is deadly; the idle soul slowly dies, and spreads destruction around it. It is the same with a country. Idleness is its ruin: whether it be that the generosity of nature removes the necessity of work, as in the South Seas, where the missionaries find one of their chief difficulties in the absolute laziness resulting from the softness of the climate and the fertility of the soil; or that the vast accumulations of wealth procure idleness for its possessors, and enforce idleness on thousands of the unfortunate unemployed,—the melan-

[1] Prov. xxi. 25. [2] Prov. xviii. 9.

choly result ensues in the enervation of manhood and the corruption of womanhood. On the other hand, as Thucydides observed in the case of Attica, a rigorous climate and a niggardly soil, eliciting all the energies of the people in order to improve their condition or even to live, have been found favourable to the development of a noble nationality. Slackness of work, from whatever cause it may arise, brings its victims into this sorrowful kinship with the destroyer.

It may be noted that the idle, whether they be rich or poor, are denominated "vain persons," and sensible people are cautioned solemnly to avoid their society, as their emptiness is contagious, and the habits which are quickly acquired in their company lead straight to ruin: "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but he that followeth after vain persons is void of understanding;"[1] "He that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough."[2]

The truth which is here enforced receives ample illustration in our own society. Two centuries ago Daniel Defoe defined the English as the "most lazy diligent nation" in the world. Hard work is common; idleness is equally common. Our people are on the whole highly gifted, and produce rapidly when they give their attention to their work; but we seem to have a strange vein of dissoluteness and laziness running through us, and consequently the worst and most shameful idleness is often found amongst the best workmen, who through their own bad habits have missed their opportunities, and become a burden to themselves and to the community. In no country is the leisured

[1] Prov. xii. 11. [2] Prov. xxviii. 19.

class, of those who do nothing at all, or pass their aimless days in a round of engagements which are only strenuous idleness, so large; in no country is the unemployed or the pauper class so ruinously great in proportion to the population. Hence this curious paradox: the foreigner hears that England is the richest and the most industrious country in the world; he comes to our shores expecting to see cities of gold and fields teeming with produce. On his arrival he becomes aware of a degrading poverty such as cannot be matched in the poorest country on earth; he finds a vast population of the unemployed rich lounging in the streets and the parks, and of the unemployed poor hanging about the doors of the innumerable drink-shops, and infesting every highway and byway of the country. He finds the land of the agricultural districts often lying idle and unproductive; those who till it untaught, ill-fed, and discontented; those who possess it discontented, though well fed and instructed. Our subject does not lead us to inquire into the deeper causes of these anomalies, but it leads us to this observation: we are a "lazy diligent nation" because we have not yet learned, or have forgotten, that the thing most to be dreaded is not poverty, but idleness; and the thing most to be desired is not wealth, but strenuous, earnest, and useful toil. Our desperate and eager work is not for the work's sake, but in order to get rich; our ambition is to be idle rather than to be employed, to be raised above the necessity of labour which is our health by the possession of wealth which is our ruin. We have cherished the fatal and foolish error that work was degrading, and have ranked those highest who did the least. "Where no oxen are," we have said in

our fastidious way, "the crib is clean," forgetting the other side of the matter, that "much increase is by the strength of the ox."[1] Thus we have ignorantly despised the workers who make us rich, looking down upon trade, upon business, and more than all upon manual labour; and have with strange fatuity admired most those who were most useless, whose peculiar boast would be that they never did a day's work in their lives.

Happily now there are signs of a revolution in our thought. We are beginning to see that work is good, not for what it earns, but for the occupation and the training which it gives to the body and the mind; and that idleness is an evil, not only where work is a necessity, and the appetite craves it of us, but everywhere and under all circumstances. In useful employment we find our life; in the sluggard's life we see our death.

We must observe then the good effects which result from honest and earnest toil. But, first, we cannot help noticing what an important place is here given to agriculture. This is not accidental to the time in which the book was written. It is an eternal principle. Out of the soil comes our wealth; by the soil therefore we live; and accordingly God has ordained that in the tilling of the ground man shall find his wholesomest, sweetest, and most strengthening employment—that no community shall inwardly flourish when its agricultural life declines; and that therefore the happiest and soundest society will be that in which the largest proportional number are engaged in producing the fruits

[1] Prov. xiv. 4.

of the earth, and are directly and vitally attached to their mother soil. "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread."[1] When a nation is in the case of the sluggard, when you pass by its fields and its vineyards and see them grown over with thorns and nettles and its stone walls broken down, you will find Pauperism coming as a robber, and Want, gaunt and hideous, stalking through the land like an armed man.[2] "Be thou diligent," therefore we are told, "to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds"—(take care that no foolish pride or negligence prevent you from seeing that the agricultural life is properly maintained, for it is the only sure basis of prosperity); "riches are not for ever, and even the government of kings does not endure to all generations." But in the sweet ordinances of nature the great Giver provides His unfailing wealth: "The hay is carried, and immediately the tender grass begins to grow again, and even the barren mountains yield their herbs for ingathering. The lambs appear every spring with their wool for our clothing, and the field will maintain goats equal in value to its own price. And from these miraculous sources of eternal reproduction our food and our maintenance are to be drawn."[3]

Thus at the foundation of all industries is the agricultural industry. At the root of all social and economical questions is the land question. When you wish to commend diligence and to discourage idleness in a nation that is "lazy diligent," the first thing is to inquire into the condition or the use of the land. The land is God's gift to a people. English land is God's

[1] Prov. xxviii. 19. [2] Prov. xxiv. 30-34. [3] Prov. xxvii. 23-27.

gift to the English people. If it is misapplied, ill-used, neglected; if it does not produce its full tale of wealth; if it does not support its full burden of living creatures, and give employment to its full number of hands, we are flying in the face of God's ordinances; we must not expect to prosper; His gracious will is frustrated, and we must have the shame and sorrow of seeing our million of paupers, and our second million of enforced idlers, and our myriads of lazy cumberers of the ground, and our whole population disorganized and unsettled, torn with the frenzy of insane work, or gangrened with the corruption of destroying idleness. For the gifts of God are without repentance, and the abuse of His gifts is without remedy.

But turning now to the good effects which result from honest and earnest toil, we are taught to distinguish three more particularly—plenty, power, and personal worth.

First, Plenty. "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."[1] Nor must we think that diligence is only manual; it is also mental. It implies thought, forethought, planning, arranging. We have a contrast drawn between the really diligent man, whose prudence foresees, and whose reflection orders his work for the best ends, and the fussy, unreflecting activity of one who is always busy, but never accomplishes anything. It is only the diligence of the first kind that leads to the desired end; the diligence of mere restlessness is not much better than idleness. We learn that "the thoughts of the diligent tend only

[1] Prov. xiii. 4.

to plenteousness, but every one that is hasty hasteth only to want."[1] Effectual labour implies thought; only a wise man, with all his faculties brought into full and harmonious play, can work with any good result, or can thriftily use the fruits of his labour; a foolish, thoughtless, witless person may work hard and earn a good deal of money, but it is gone even faster than it came. Thus "there is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of *the wise*, but a foolish man swalloweth it up."[2] There are exceptions, no doubt; but the general rule is borne out by experience, that they who honestly and earnestly use the gifts of mind and body which God has given them, obtain the things which are needful in this life, if not to overflowing, yet in sufficiency; and where means fail we generally have to admit that our own industry or prudence was at fault.

Then, *secondly*, it is industry rather than genius which commends us to our fellow-men, and leads us to positions of influence and power: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men;"[3] "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, but the slothful shall be put under task-work."[4] It is this golden faculty of persistence, concentration, diligence, which makes every great ruler and leader of men, and raises even the very ordinary person out of the drudgery of mere task-work into the dignity of large and noble and delightful toil.

For, *thirdly*, it is diligence, the capacity of taking pains, that gives to a man his actual worth, making him compact and strong and serviceable: "The pre-

[1] Prov. xxi. 5.
[2] Prov. xxi. 20.
[3] Prov. xxii. 29.
[4] Prov. xii. 24.

cious substance of men is to be diligent."[1] It is the quality itself which is all important. The greatest gifts are of little worth, unless there is this guarantee of the conscientious and intelligent employment of them. While if the gifts with which God has endowed us are of the simplest order, if we can only use a spade or a saw or a broom effectively, that faculty diligently exercised is our value to the world; and a great value it is—greater than the value of high genius which is erratic, unbridled, undirected, and uncertain. Of every man or woman in this world the highest praise which can be uttered is that which underlies the commendation of the good wife: "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."[2] There is the epitome of all trustworthy and honourable character.

We have been dwelling all this time on a simple virtue of a very mundane type. But all that has been said may be immediately raised to a higher plane by one observation. Our Lord and Master was diligent about His Father's business, and has left on record this saying: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is called to-day; for the night cometh, in which no one can work." As each one of us comes under His influence and passes into His faith and obedience, the joyful seriousness of our life-work deepens; it is lit by the rich glow of a sunset glory. We want to do diligently what our hand finds to do—to do it earnestly as unto the Lord. By patient and industrious exercise of every faculty which He has given us, we wish to be prepared for any task which

[1] Prov. xii. 27. [2] Prov. xxxi. 27.

He may appoint here or hereafter. Some of us He only apprentices in this world; and according to the faithfulness with which we discharge our humble and unnoticed duties will be the service to which He will one day appoint us. Others are called out of apprenticeship into the rough and eager work of the journeyman, and His eye is always upon us as He tries us to find whether we may ever be appointed over one, or five, or ten cities. A few supreme souls have been called even on earth to shape, to create, to control; a Paul, an Augustine, a Luther, can work with an emancipated hand. But the law is one all through the workshops, the fields, the vineyards of our Lord. The diligent shall stand before Him, and the slothful shall be shamed. He that does not plough will not reap. Wasted opportunities vanish for ever, and leave only their doleful record in the emasculated and nerveless soul.

XXI.

WINE.

"He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man:
He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich."

PROV. xxi. 17.

THE Septuagint translation has an interesting addition to the proverb in xii. 11. After "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but he that followeth after vain persons is void of understanding," it adds, "He who is sweet in pastimes of wine-drinking shall leave dishonour in his strongholds." Drinking is the natural opposite of hard and honest work. When the love of it takes possession of a man he is sure to become a useless and unproductive member of society. A drunken people are in the end an incapable people; their wealth declines, their industries pass over to soberer rivals, their qualities of brain and muscle gradually disappear. This is partly owing to the deterioration of mind and body which results from the excessive use of stimulants; but it is still more due to a wider cause: drinking in all its branches is indulged in as a pleasure. Why do we not admit it? why do we always try to present it in another light, saying that it is for health's sake, by a doctor's orders; or for work's sake, by a proved necessity? Is it not that we

are secretly conscious of taking the drink because we like it? We know it is a self-indulgence, and we are a little ashamed of it; and as self-indulgence is always fatal in the long run to all the habits and activities which men very properly honour, we should dearly like to screen it under a decent pretext which might preserve our self-respect. We know quite well that "he that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich."[1] Drinking is after all only a pronounced symptom of a large vice—self-indulgence.

A great step is taken when we have learnt to quietly and candidly face this fact: we drink, as a society, as a nation,—each of us drinks in public or in private,—simply because it is pleasant. It is a habit governed by one supreme and absolute law—*we like it.* We know quite well that alcohol is not a food; that is proved by the most irrefragable scientific evidence; and if in alcoholic drinks there are certain nutritive elements, we could if we chose secure the benefit of them without any admixture of alcohol. We know that in many cases the alcohol is actually deleterious, that it produces specific and very terrible diseases, that it lowers the tone of the whole system and makes us liable to all kinds of secondary troubles. We may urge that alcohol is a medicine, and a useful medicine; but it is not as a medicine we use it. If a doctor prescribes castor-oil, or quinine, we throw aside the medicine on the first opportunity, often before it has done its work. Alcohol is the only medicine which we continue to take for a lifetime because the doctor

[1] Prov. xxi. 17.

prescribed it for a month. Would it not be better then to clear our minds of cant, and to set the whole matter on its right basis? Intoxicants are drunk as a form, as the most universal form, of self-indulgence. In some mysterious way, for some mysterious reasons which we cannot fathom, they gratify an instinctive appetite, they are naturally and generally attractive, they exercise a spell over the physical system. If the taste is, as some people say, acquired, it was acquired by mankind in prehistoric times, and is part of our inherited constitution as men. For instance, Mr. Gaule, a police-court missionary in Birmingham, relates a recent experience, one out of many in his fourteen years of labour. A young married woman, twenty-eight years of age, died a shocking death from drinking. Up to the age of twenty-six she had been a teetotaller, and did not know what the taste of drink was. She was a leading member of the Gospel Temperance Mission, and sang the solos at the meetings. Then she was taken ill, the doctor ordered brandy, and it proved like the first taste of blood to a tame tiger. She could never again be kept from it, and at last it killed her. The craving there must have been in the very blood.

We have a taste for these intoxicants, latent or realized. The stimulating influence is pleasant, the narcotic influence is pleasant. The immediate effect on the body is pleasant, the immediate effect on the mind is pleasant. Drink produces a sense of great self-satisfaction, promotes a flow of conversation and a feeling of good fellowship; it quickens at first several of our mental faculties; it excites the imagination, and carries its devotee far away from the actual, which is painful and harassing, into a kind of ideal world, which

is cheerful and agreeable. So powerful is its temporary influence that in the "words of King Lemuel" there is positively a recommendation to "give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul; let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."[1] An injunction which must not of course be mistaken for a Divine precept, but only for a reminder of the fact—a fact which may be observed without any moral judgment being passed upon it—that while men who require all their mental and moral faculties to be in full activity[2] must eschew the use of intoxicating drinks, the dying, the despairing, the very poor and miserable, may find a certain relief in drinking. Men who are in the enjoyment of health, and wish to discharge effectively the day's duties, have no excuse for the employment of an agent which only serves to lull the mind into forgetfulness and to reduce the pain of consciousness to the lowest possible point.

Strange to say, while men are thus naturally inclined to use intoxicants, nature has been most lavish in pandering to their tastes. There are trees in tropical climates which have but to be gashed, and an intoxicating juice flows out ready at once for use. Almost every natural juice ferments if it is left alone. The palm-tree, the potato-plant, the sugar-cane, beet-root, the cereals, as well as the grape, yield readily these intoxicating drinks, at a surprisingly low cost. Very little human labour is needed, very simple apparatus will suffice, so that a very few enterprising firms can deluge a whole continent with fiery intoxicants.

[1] Prov. xxxi. 6, 7. [2] Prov. xxxi. 4, 5.

We drink because we like it,—not for our good, as we pretend, but for our pleasure, as we are half ashamed to confess. The taste is natural to us,—natural to savages, natural to civilised men, natural, so far as we know, to men of all climates and all races. And nature has made it singularly easy to gratify the taste.

Now one might almost suppose that the conclusion to be drawn would be, "Let us drink, let us take this element as a good gift of God." And that was the feeling of more primitive times. In the Vedas, for instance, Indra is praised as reeling with the intoxicating Soma which his worshippers have offered to him; drunkenness is regarded as a kind of inspiration. But no; as wisdom asserts herself, and demands a hearing, she more and more decisively classes this taste for intoxicants with certain other tastes which are natural to us, but none the less dangerous; and she treats the bountiful provision which nature has made for the gratification of the taste as one of those innumerable temptations with which men in this present life are surrounded,—in conflict with which they prove their manhood,—by victory over which they acquire strength of moral principle and consistency in virtue.

As the reason within gathers power and authority, and as her clear light is replenished by the revelation of Divine Wisdom, all the spurious attractions of drinking are weakened, the glamour is destroyed, and the truth is recognised that "wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whosoever erreth thereby is not wise;"[1] more and more it appears that the power of wine is the power of the animal within us, and that the

[1] Prov. xx. 1.

widespread influence of it is a sign that the animal within us dies slowly; we learn to measure the growth of reason by the degree of mastery which has been obtained over the low appetite; and we understand that striking antithesis of the New Testament religion, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit."

The way then in which we are brought to look at the drink question is this: here is a powerful natural temptation, a seduction which nature herself offers to the body, a foe which always has a traitor in collusion with it inside the assaulted citadel. This enemy is ingenious in its argumentation: it approaches usually under the guise of a friend; it says—and not without truth—that it comes to give pleasure to poor harassed and toil-worn mortals; it persuades them that it is a wholesome food, and when that contention is shattered it would have them believe that it is a medicine. When it has gained an entrance into the fortress, by fair means or foul, it at first proceeds very doucely, and seems to justify its presence by numberless obvious benefits. Sometimes it will successfully hide all the evil it is working, as if its purpose were to beguile new victims and to acquire a more unbounded sway over the old.

As religious men, as spiritual beings, whom God claims to become His children, we are called upon to face this subtle, powerful, and all-persuasive foe. We are to do our best to understand its ways—we look to science to help us and to teach us. We are then to take every weapon within our reach to resist its approach,—argument, persuasion, entreaty; we are to lose no opportunity of unveiling the tactics of the foe, and rousing those who are imperilled to a sense of their danger;

then as Christian citizens we are bound to use all the influence we possess to hold this terrible natural temptation within the straitest limits, and to fortify all the powers of resistance in our fellow-men to the highest possible degree.

In such a crusade against the enemy of our race, few things are more effectual than a vivid and accurate delineation of the effects which drink produces—such a delineation, for instance, as that which is given in chap. xxiii. 29-35. Let us proceed to examine this remarkable passage.

"Whose is Oh? whose is woe?" asks the Teacher. Who is it whose constant and appropriate language is that of lamentation—the piteous cry of pain, the agonised exclamation of remorse? "Whose are contentions?" Who is it that lives in an atmosphere of perpetual strife and loud quarrellings? "Whose is groaning?"—that sustained sigh of desponding and irremediable misery. "Whose are causeless wounds?"—not only the bruise and the gash which result from furious sparrings or unforeseen falls, but also wounds of the spirit, self-loathing, and shame, the thought of what might have been, the realization of a ruined home, and of suffering wife and little ones, and the conviction that the evil can now never be undone. "Whose is the darkling of the eyes?"[1] Who is it whose eyes have that horrible inflamed, lack-lustre look, which is the exact opposite

[1] The difficulty of the word חַכְלִלוּת, which means "dimming," is that in the only other place where it occurs (Gen. xlix. 12: "His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk") the redness is evidently regarded as an advantageous attribute. But perhaps the explanation is to be sought in the fact that the immediate effect of wine upon the eye is to darken it in one sense, and the

of the light and clearness and sparkle proper to the human eye?

The answer to these questions is given in a sentence, "Theirs who tarry over the wine, theirs who go to try the mixture." It is not of course suggested that all who drink wine, nor even all who take it habitually, fall into the horrible condition which has just been described; this condition is the result of lingering over the drink, spending hours in tippling, devoting time and thought to tasting various brands and samples, becoming a connoisseur of strong beverages, allowing the subject to occupy an appreciable proportion of one's time. It is not the use, but the abuse, of the thing which in this passage is reprobated. But now we are reminded of the great difficulty which occurs in distinguishing between the use and the abuse. There is no sharply-defined limit. There is no mechanical monitor which at once reminds us, "Here use ceases and abuse begins." Almost the only rule that can be given is, that whenever the cup seems in the least degree attractive, then danger is near and it is necessary to abstain. "Look not on wine when it reddens, when it gives its gleam in the cup; it goes down so smoothly!" It is the peculiarity of this substance that it can only be taken safely when it has comparatively no attractions, when it is taken under orders, and as it were against the grain. If it is really pleasant to us, we can never tell where the pleasantness melts into a dangerous fascination,

ultimate effect is to darken it in another. In the first moment of excitement the pupil of the drinker's eye dilates and flashes with a darkling fire; but it is not long before the eye becomes heavy, dim, watery, and maudlin. It is in this last sense that we must understand the word here.

where the colour and the sparkle and the agreeable tingle which make it pass so easily down the throat have become the lure and the spell of a poisonous reptile. For this pleasant indulgence, which seems to be perfectly innocent, what is the issue of it? "Its end—like a serpent it bites, and like a basilisk it stings." One evil result of it is that it rouses into perilous activity the dormant passions; even pure men and women under this potent influence become impure. The eyes which are excited with wine will turn readily to loose and degraded women.[1] The fall which might have been easily avoided in a state of sobriety will be inevitable when the reason is silenced, the will enfeebled, and the desire inflamed by this seductive poison.

Another evil effect is that the sense of truth entirely disappears. What a misleading maxim is that of the Romans, *In vino veritas!* While it is a fact that the intoxicated man will blab many things which were best kept concealed, there is nothing which deteriorates truthfulness so rapidly as the use of alcohol. The drinker becomes crafty and deceitful and untrustworthy. The miserable brain is haunted with chimæras, the imperious appetite suggests all kinds of subterfuges and evasions, the very "heart speaks frauds." Yes, nothing could be more accurate than this: the effect of drink is not so much to make the lips lie, as to make the inner man essentially insincere and deceptive. No man admits that he is a drunkard, even to his own

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Prov. xxiii. 33. זָרוֹת must, as in xxii. 14, be rendered "strange women" (Bertheau). The alternative rendering, "the strange, or the rare" (Nowack) is logically inadmissible, because the verse is obviously describing the moral effects of drink, and no one can say that to see strange or rare visions is a moral effect to be specially deprecated.

heart; long after all his friends know it, and are beginning to despair of him, even when he has had several attacks of *delirium tremens* and is a confirmed dipsomaniac, the most he will allow is that he has sometimes taken a little more than is good for him, but so very little seems to upset him. Ah, "thine heart shall utter froward things," *i.e.*, frauds. Every one who has had any dealings with the miserable victims of drink will sorrowfully confirm this statement.

The insecurity of the habit is incredible. It leads to the destruction of every faculty which God has mercifully given us to protect us from danger and guide us through life. The ready perception of things is marred, the quick rallying of the attention is delayed, the exercise of the understanding is prevented, the will is paralysed, the conscience dies. "Thou shalt be as he who lieth down in the heart of the sea,"—as one in a calenture who strides into the merciless waves under the impression that he is walking on flowery meadows. Thou shalt be "as he that goeth to bed on the mast's head,"—where the position is precarious even if the sea be perfectly calm, but becomes sure destruction if the winds awake and the ship begins to climb large billows and to plunge down into their unquiet troughs.

And then, worst of all, when there is a temporary recovery from this abominable state of drunkenness, and the feeble wails of repentance begin to be heard, what can be more disconnected—more futile—more abject—more irrational than his words? "They have smitten me," he says; "I have not been sick,"—as if forsooth he were the victim of some violence offered to him by others, instead of being the author of his own stripes; as if he were quite right and well, and the

disease were not deep in his own passion-haunted heart. "They have stricken me," he continues to whine, "I have not known it." Footpads have attacked him, he would have us believe, and that is the explanation of his begrimed and blood-smeared face, his torn clothes, and his empty pockets. "When shall I awake?" he mutters, as the swimming sensation in the head, and the unsteady stagger in his step, remind him that he is not quite himself. And then—is it possible? Yes, his next remark is, "I will seek it again." I will go and get another drink. His miserable mind, the victim and the mint of lies, having persuaded him that all the mischief came from some cause other than himself, and had nothing to do with the one degrading habit which really produced it, he proposes at once to seek the very agent which is his undoing, to heal his intoxication by getting drunk again.[1]

This vivid and forcible picture of the miserable sufferings, the contemptible vices, and the helpless bondage which result from intoxicating drinks, is all the more impressive because there is no attempt made to enforce total abstinence as a principle. If however it is duly considered and understood, it is very likely to produce total abstinence as a practice, just as the object lesson of the drunken helot led every Spartan youth to turn with unspeakable loathing from the embruting vice. Modest minds, observing how the mighty are fallen,

[1] "The primary discomforts of an act of drunkenness," says Dr. G. W. Balfour, "are readily removed for the time by a repetition of the cause. Thus what has been an act may readily become a habit, all the more readily that each repetition more and more enfeebles both the will and the judgment."—Art. "Drunkenness" in *Encycl. Brit.*

how this one cause has ruined the strongest, the best, and the most attractive of their fellow-creatures, insidiously leading them on, mocking them, and luring them into dangerous and poisonous marshes, will be inclined to say, as Daniel said, "I will abstain; I may be safe or I may not; if I am safe all I gain is a certain amount of animal pleasure; if I am not, what I lose is health, honour, wealth, even life itself,—not the body only, but the soul too.' The gain from the use of these things is very measurable and insignificant; the loss from their abuse is immeasurable, and the passage from use to abuse escapes at once our observation and control.

But, after all, wisdom urges temperance in drinking only as a part of a much larger principle. If temperance in drinking stands alone and unconnected with this larger principle, it is a blessing of a very doubtful kind, so doubtful indeed that the pharisaism, the intolerance, the dogmatism, which are able to subsist with "Temperance" in the limited sense, have often been the most serious hindrance to temperance in its larger and nobler meaning.

It is the desire of pleasure which is at the root of the mischief: "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man." Men are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."[1] The appetites which are natural to us hold undisputed sway, they are fleshly; the great spiritual appetites, which are supernatural, are quite feeble and inoperative. Men ask for that which is pleasant, and

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 4—φιλήδονοι μᾶλλον ἢ φιλόθεοι, pleasure-loving rather than God-loving; which means, not that men place pleasure before them consciously as a substitute for God, but only that the instinctive desire of pleasure has not been mastered by the love of God.

even when they become religious it is only to obtain pleasure, a greater and a more lasting pleasure; thus there is an intemperance, which we call fanaticism, even in religious beliefs and in religious practices. But what men need is that the desire of God, for His own sake, should be so inflamed in them as to burn up all other desires. And this desire can only be created by His Holy Spirit. The competing and manifold desires of pleasure can only be mastered and expelled when that great, absorbing, and embracing desire of God has been securely settled in the human heart by the Holy Spirit. True temperance is really one of the ninefold fruits of the Spirit, and is of little value, a mere spurious product, unless it is accompanied by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and meekness. Such passages as we have been considering in the book of Proverbs may give us a wholesome horror and hatred of drunkenness, and may even lead us to a prudential temperance—they may even make us as sober as pious Mohammedans or Buddhists; but if we are to become really temperate a higher power must intervene, we must be "born of the Spirit." Is it not remarkable how nothing short of the highest remedy—the new birth—is effectual for curing even the slightest of human infirmities and sins?

XXII.

THE TREATMENT OF THE POOR.

"The rich and the needy meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all."—PROV. xxii. 2.

"He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed, for he giveth of his bread to the poor."—PROV. xxii. 9.

"He that oppresseth the poor, it is for his increase; he that giveth to the rich, it is for want."—PROV. xxii. 16.

"Rob not the poor because he is poor, neither oppress the humble in the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and despoil of life those that despoil them."—PROV. xxii. 22, 23.

IF we would understand and lay to heart the very striking lessons of this book on the treatment of the poor, it will be well for us to observe that there are four words in the Hebrew original which are rendered by our English words "poor" or "needy." These words we will try to discriminate and to use with more exactness in the present lecture, that we may not miss any of the teaching by the blur and obscurity of careless language. *First*, there is a word (דָּל) for which we will reserve our English word "poor"; it signifies a person who is weak and uninfluential, but not necessarily destitute or even in want. The "poor" are those who form the vast majority of every society, and are sometimes described by the word "masses." *Secondly*, there is a word (רָשׁ) which may be rendered "needy." It covers

those who are in actual want, people who through bereavement, or infirmity, or unavoidable calamity are unable to secure a sufficiency of the necessaries of life *Thirdly*, there is a word (עָנִי) which we may perhaps render by "humble," for though it more literally describes the afflicted and sad, it contains within it a hint of moral commendation which suggests a transition from the idea of simple weakness and helplessness to that of patient and humble dependence on God. *Lastly*, there is a word (אֶבְיוֹן) which we will render "destitute." If we keep these notions—"poor," "needy," "humble," "destitute"—distinct, and yet combined, to form one conception, we shall find that the proverbs before us refer to that large section of mankind who are in a worldly and material sense considered the least fortunate; those to whom it is a lifelong effort merely to live; those who have no margin of security on which to fall back in case of disaster or sickness; those who are engaged in precarious employments or in casual labour; those who may keep their heads above water by diligence and unremitting exertions, but may at any time go under; those who owing to this constant pressure of the elementary needs have but little leisure to cultivate their faculties, and little opportunity to maintain their rights. We are to think of the large class of persons who in more primitive times are slaves, who in feudal times are serfs, who in modern times are called the proletariate; those in whose interest the laws of society have not hitherto been framed, because they have not until quite recently been admitted to any substantial share in the work of legislation; those who have always found it peculiarly difficult to secure

justice, because justice is a costly commodity, and they have no means to spare, since "the destruction of the poor is precisely their poverty."[1] We are not to think of the idle and the vicious, who are so often classed with the poor, because they, like the poor, are without means,—we must rigorously exclude these, for they are not in the mind of the writer when he gives us these golden precepts. We must remember that it is part of our peculiar English system, the result of our boasted Poor Law, to discredit the very word poverty, by refusing to discriminate between the poor in the scriptural sense, who are honourable and even noble, and the pauper in the modern sense, who is almost always the scum of a corrupt social order, in four cases out of five a drunkard, and in the fifth case the product of some one else's moral failings. It requires quite an effort for us to see and realize what the Scriptures mean by the poor. We have to slip away from all the wretched associations of the Poor House, the Poor Law, and the Guardians. We have to bring before our minds a class which in a wholesome state of society would be a small, numerable minority, but in our own unwholesome state of society are a large and well-nigh innumerable majority,—not only the destitute and the actually needy, but all the people who have no land on which to live, no house which they can call their own, no reserve fund, no possibility of a reserve fund, against the unavoidable calamities and chances of life, the people who are trodden down—who tread each other down—in the race of competition; all those, too, who, according to

[1] Prov. x. 15.

the godless dogma of the day, must go to the wall because they are weak, and must give up the idea of surviving because only the fittest must expect to survive. There rise up before our imagination the toiling millions of Europe—of England—worn, pale, despondent, apathetic, and resigned; or bitter, desperate, and resentful; not destitute, though they include the destitute; not needy, though they include the needy; but poor, without strength except in combination, and often when combined without light or leading.

I. Now the first thing we have to observe is that *the poor*, in the sense we have tried to define, are a special concern to the Lord. "Rob not the poor," says the text, "because he is poor, neither oppress the humble in the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause, and despoil of life those that despoil them." "Remove not the ancient landmark, and enter not into the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is strong, He shall plead their cause against thee."[1] "The Lord will establish the border of the widow."[2] So intimate is the connection between the Lord and His poor creatures that "he that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker, but he that hath mercy on the destitute honoureth Him."[3] "Whoso mocketh the needy reproacheth his Maker, and he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished."[4] On the other hand, "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and his good deed will He pay him again."[5]

Not, of course, that there is any favouritism with

[1] Prov. xxiii. 10, 11.
[2] Prov. xv. 25.
[3] Prov. xiv. 31.
[4] Prov. xvii. 5.
[5] Prov. xix. 17.

God, not that He has an interest in a man because of his means or lack of means; but just because of His large and comprehensive impartiality. "The needy man and the oppressor meet together; the Lord lighteneth the eyes of them both."[1] "The rich and the needy meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all."[2] His special interest in the poor arises only from their special need, from the mute cry which goes up to Him, from the appeal to Him as their only friend, deliverer, and protector: just as His lesser interest in the rich arises from their self-satisfied independence of Him, from their infatuated trust in themselves, and from their conviction that already all things belong to them. We should make a mistake if we supposed that the Lord recognises any class distinctions, or that He valued a man because he is poor, just as we value a man because he is rich. The truth rather is that He absolutely ignores the class distinctions, regarding the mingled mass of human beings, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, as on a plane of dead equality, and then distinguishing between them on a totally different principle,—on a moral, a spiritual principle; and, if there is any preference, it is on the ground of certain valuable moral effects which poverty sometimes produces that He takes the poor into His peculiar and tender care, honouring them with so close a friendship that service to them becomes service to Him.

This is certainly good news to the masses. "You are undistinguished, and unobserved,"—the voice of wisdom seems to say,—"In this world, with its false

[1] Prov. xix. 13. [2] Prov. xxii. 2.

distinctions and perverted ideals, you feel at a constant disadvantage. You dare hardly claim the rights of your manhood and your womanhood. This great personage, possessing half a city, drawing as much unearned money every day as you can earn by unremitting toil in fifteen or twenty years, seems to overshadow and to dwarf you. And there are these multitudes of easy, comfortable, resplendent persons who live in large mansions and dress in costly garments, while you and your family live in a couple of precarious rooms at a weekly rental, and find it all you can do to get clean and decent clothes for your backs. These moneyed people are held in much estimation; you, so far as you know, are held in none. Their doings—births, marriages, deaths—create quite a stir in the world; you slip into the world, through it, and out of it, without attracting any attention. But be assured things wear a different appearance from the standpoint of God. Realize how you and your fellow-men appear to Him, and you at once recover self-respect, and hold up your head in His presence as a man. That simple truth which the Ayrshire peasant sang[1] you may take as God's truth, as His revelation; it is the way in which He habitually thinks of you."

How the scales seem to fall away from one's eyes

[1] "What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin-grey, and a' that;
Gie fools their silks and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
Their tinsel show and a' that,
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that."

directly we are enabled to see men and things as God sees them! The sacred worth of humanity shines far brighter than any of its tinsel trappings. We learn to estimate ourselves aright, undisturbed and unabashed by the false estimates which are current in the world. Our true distinction is that we are men, that we belong to a race which was made in the image of God, was dear to His heart, and is redeemed by His love. The equality we claim for men is not a levelling down—it is quite the reverse; it is raising them up to the higher level which they have deserted and forgotten; it is teaching them to live as men, distinguished not by their accidental circumstances or possessions, but by their manhood itself. It is giving men self-respect instead of self-esteem, teaching them not to vaunt themselves as one against another, but to claim their high and honourable title, one and all, as the sons of God.

II. But now it follows that, if the Lord Himself espouses the cause of the poor, and even identifies Himself with them, ill-treatment of them, injustice to them, or even a wilful neglect of them and disregard of their interests, must be a sin, and a very terrible sin. "He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth; but he that hath pity on the humble, happy is he." [1]

In the East to this day the proverb, "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it," [2] has its

[1] Prov. xiv. 21.

[2] Prov. xi. 26. The following description of Persia, in the *Missionary Review of the World*, October, 1889, p. 782, aptly illustrates the practices against which the text inveighs:—"The sole end for which the Persian Government exists is the collection of the revenue, the fleecing of the

full significance. But even in the West, where the name of Christ is borne by the nations, it is a common thing for one or two greedy and selfish capitalists to form a "corner"—as the commercial slang of the day denominates it—in some article of industry, *i.e.*, to secure all the raw material in the market, and to hold it until a famine price can be demanded. Meanwhile, the mills are idle, the looms are silent, the workpeople are unemployed, and their families suffer. Our moral sense is not yet sufficiently cultivated to condemn this hideous selfishness as severely as it deserves, and to regard the perpetrators of it as enemies of the human race. "The people curse" them, that is all. But as we have seen that the cause of the wage-earners is the cause of the Lord, we may rest quite confident that He to whom vengeance belongs enters every action of the kind in His unerasable accounts, and reserves the inevitable punishment for these "oppressors of the poor."

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people. Large portions of the land, confiscated from time to time, belong to the Sovereign, and are farmed out on terms well-nigh ruinous to the tenant. Even where property belongs to the subject, it is taxed to the last degree as a starting-point, while the successions of sub-rulers and collectors make still further drains upon the moiety that must save the labourer's family from absolute want. The whole burden of taxation thus comes really upon the labouring class. Added to this extortion is the constant uncertainty as to whether the planter will be permitted to reap his crop at all. Downright robbery of fields or households by the retainers of petty chiefs is of frequent occurrence, and the poor are liable any day to be deprived of their very last resource. Agriculture and other industries so discouraged and paralysed barely sustain the lives of the people at the best, and when drought is added thousands must perish." In times of scarcity, "The king sets the example—*locks up his granaries, and withholds every kernel of wheat except at famine prices.* Every nabob and landowner who has a stock on hand follows this example. Rapacity and cupidity rule; money is coined out of the sufferings of the poor."

There is another evil of modern industrial life which is alluded to in the Proverbs before us. No oppression of the poor is more terrible than that which is exercised by those who themselves are needy. The system which results from necessity of this kind is termed "sweating." The hungry contractor undertakes the job at the lowest possible price, and secures his profit by getting hungrier and weaker creatures than himself to do the work at a price lower than possible, literally at starvation wages. What force, then, to modern ears is there in the saying, "A needy man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food"![1]

The Divine oversight of these industrial abuses is not, as we sometimes suppose, pretermitted. Wisdom and Justice and Love hold the reins, and though the rapacity and cupidity of men seem to have a wide range, they are inevitably pulled up in the end, if not in this partial and transient life, yet in that long Eternity through which the Eternal will work out His purposes. As He Himself sides with the poor and pities them, and turns with indignation against their oppressors, it follows necessarily that "he that augments his substance by usury and increase gathereth

[1] Prov. xxviii. 3. Oddly enough the commentators, who seem never to have heard of "sweating," propose to read for רָשׁ, either עָשִׁיר = rich, or רֹאשׁ = רֹשׁ = head, for the head of the State; an example of conjectural emendation which may well make us cautious of the mere scholar's method of treating the sacred text.

"The cruellest landlords, receiving 10, 20, and 30 per cent. from detestable habitations (in London), are nearly connected by birth and circumstance to those they oppress" (*Lecture delivered at Essex Hall*, November 18th, 1889, *by Thomas Locke Worthington*).

it for him that pities the poor."[1] In fact, the merciful and pitiful nature has all the forces that rule the universe on its side, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary: "The merciful man doeth good to his own soul, but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh."[2]

It is the strange paradox of all selfishness that the selfish man is really quite blind to his own true interests. He most conscientiously lives for himself, and seeks his own good, but the good he sought proves to be his evil, and of all his innumerable foes he finds at last that he himself is the worst. The selfish man is always coming to want, while the unselfish man whose whole thought has been for others is richly provided for. "He that giveth unto the needy shall not lack,

[1] Prov. xxviii. 8. The difficult verse Proverbs xxii. 16 should find a place here, "He that oppresses the poor to increase for him, he that gives to the rich only for need," but it is impossible to accurately determine its meaning. If the rendering of the English Bible is correct, we may interpret the proverb as a statement of the folly of oppression which leads to want as inevitably as the more obvious folly of giving to the rich. But possibly Nowack is right in an interpretation which gives quite another turn to the saying, and makes it not a condemnation of the oppressor, but a suggestion of the advantage which may be gained from the oppression by the oppressed. "He who oppresses the poor—it turns to his (viz., the poor man's) gain," because it calls out all his energy and endurance, "while he who gives to the rich—it turns only to want," because it still further enervates and unfits him for the duties of life. This is not very satisfactory, and is decidedly far-fetched; but it is better than Delitzsch's suggestion, which strips the proverb of all moral significance, viz., "He that oppresses the poor, it is at any rate for his own gain; but he who gives to the rich, it is only to get want." The conclusion from this would be, that it is better to oppress the poor than to give to the rich, a sentiment quite out of harmony with the ethical teaching of the Proverbs. In a case like this we can only suppose that the saying has reached us in a mutilated form.

[2] Prov. xi. 17.

but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse."[1] "There is that scattereth and increaseth yet more, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth only to want."[2]

"He that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse!" Yes, nothing is more striking than this truth, that not only positive oppression of the poor, but mere indifference to their state, mere neglect of their sufferings, involves us in sin. There are many who can honestly say that they have not deliberately wronged their fellow-men, and will on that ground plead innocent; but that is not enough. We are as members one of another responsible in a degree for all the injustice and cruelty which are practised in the society to which we belong. If we are drawing an income from invested money, we are responsible for the cruel exactions of excessive work, for the heartless disregard of life and limb, and for the constant under-payment of the workers which makes the dividends so princely.[3] Nay, when we buy

[1] Prov. xxviii. 27. [2] Prov. xi. 24.

[3] Can the shareholders of the G. W. R., for instance, hold themselves free from responsibility in the case referred to in the following paragraph from the *Journal of the People's Palace?* "The *Saturday Review*, always trustworthy and read-worthy on subjects of law, calls attention to a case which concerns a great many. It is a case in which the decision is most unfortunate to the interests of all working men. One Membery was employed at Paddington to shunt trunks: he was taken on by a contractor, but his real employers were the G.W.R. The trucks were drawn by a horse, and the horse ought to have had a boy to hitch on or off at a moment's notice: but the contractor refused to supply boys. Membery in vain asked for one, pointing out the great dangers to which he was exposed. He complained on the very day of the accident by which he was knocked down and injured seriously. He sued the Company; he won his case with damages; the Company, being a rich body, appealed. Now, con-

and use the cheap goods, which are cheap because they have been made at the cost of health and happiness and life to our brothers and our sisters, their blood is upon our heads, though we choose to forget it. For listen—"Whoso stoppeth ears at the cry of the poor," whoso tries to ignore that there is a labour question, and that the cry for increased or even regular wages, and for tolerable homes, and wholesome conditions of work, is a reality, and in form of unions, or strikes, or low wails of despair, is addressed to us all—"he shall cry and shall not be heard."[1] Such is the inexorable law of God. And again: "Deliver those that are carried away unto death,"—those who are sacrificing the sweetness of life, the sap of the bones, the health of the marrow, to the ruthless exigencies of the industrial machine; "and those tottering to slaughter see thou hold back,"—not leaving them to "dree their own sad weird," helpless and unregarded. "If thou say,

sidering the vexation, the anxiety, and the expense of carrying on such a case, a Company which appeals ought in justice to have the damages doubled if it loses. The Company lost. They appealed to the Lords, still on the principle of being rich and their opponent poor. This time the Company won. The Lords have ruled that the Company did not employ Membery, and that he was not obliged to work without a boy: he might have refused to work at all. Indeed! Then, if he refused to work, what about the children at home? A more mischievous doctrine was never upheld. Why, there are thousands and thousands of men and women who work daily under ineffectual protest,—who work at trades unwholesome, for wages inefficient, and for excessive hours; yet they work because they must—because they must. Membery worked without a boy, knowing that he would some day be run over and perhaps killed, because he must: he had no choice. When all the Trade Unions are merged into one immense Trade Union, it will not be the wages alone that will be determined, but the cases of such unfortunate men as Membery."

[1] Prov. xxi. 13.

Behold we knew not this man,"—how could we make ourselves acquainted with all the toiling masses of the city by whose labour we lived and were maintained in comfort?—"Doth not He that weigheth the hearts consider it; and He that keepeth thy soul, doth not He know it, and shall not He render to every man according to his work?"[1] That is to say, if we plead, "When saw we Thee ahungred, or athirst, or sick and in prison, and came not to Thee?" our Lord will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me." And we "shall go away" into everlasting punishment, while the righteous go into life eternal.

III. For it follows, from the whole consideration of this subject, that those who make their life a ministry to the poor obtain a blessing,—yes, the only true and permanent blessing that life is capable of yielding. "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."[2] The very form of the saying is significant. Does it not imply: "It is obvious that to give our bread to the poor is a blessing to ourselves, so obvious that it needs only to be stated to be admitted, and therefore, as the bountiful eye, the philanthropic observation, the readiness to see suffering and to search out the sufferers, necessarily leads to this generous distribution, it must be a blessing to its possessor. Indeed, this is a true test of righteousness, as the Lord teaches in the parable just quoted. It is "the righteous that takes knowledge of the cause of the poor, while the wicked understands not to know it."[3] A religion which takes no knowledge of the masses

[1] Prov. xxiv. 11, 12. [2] Prov. xxii. 9. [3] Prov. xxix. 7.

is a false religion; a Church and a Ministry which "understand not to know" the condition of the people and the needs of the poor are not Christ's Church and Christ's Ministry, but flagrantly apostate; and nothing is plainer than this—that from such a Church and Ministry He will accept no orthodoxy of belief or valiant defence of the creed in lieu of obedience to all His plain and unmistakable commandments.

If we look at governments, the test is practically the same. "The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever."[1] And it is because the Messianic King, alone of all sovereigns and governments, rightly and fully understands and maintains the cause of the poor, that He alone of sovereigns shall be established for ever, and of the increase of His government there shall be no end. And for the flagrant neglect of this vital question on the part of all governing persons and assemblies, that King will call to account those pompous and wordy magnates who have borne the sword in vain, considering all interests rather than those of the poor, whom they were specially appointed to judge; and of the needy, to whose succour they were peculiarly bound to run.

And what holds in the state holds in the family. The virtuous woman, and head of the household—she whom God can approve and welcome into everlasting habitations—is emphatically not she who is always striving for social aggrandisement, always seeking for her children wealthy settlements and spurious honours; but is one who "spreadeth out her hand to

[1] Prov. xxix. 14. Has William II. of Germany been considering this text? If so, it is full of promise for the prosperity of Germany and of Europe? (International Labour Conference, March 1890.)

the poor, yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."[1]

Well may we try to take God's view of this question, to understand what He means by the poor, and how He regards them, and how He expects us to treat them. For this, if it is not the secret and the centre of all true religious life, is at least the infallible test of whether our religious life is true or not. By our treatment of His poor, the Son of Man, who is to judge the world, declares that we shall be judged. "By that we shall be condemned or by that we shall be acquitted."

[1] Prov. xxxi. 30.

XXIII.

EDUCATION. THE PARENT'S THOUGHT OF THE CHILD.

"Train up a child according to his way, and even when he is old he will not depart from it."—PROV. xxii. 6.

"Withhold not correction from the child; if thou beat him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol."—PROV. xxiii. 13, 14.

IN Lecture IV. we examined two of the main principles which should be inculcated on children in a Christian home. In the present lecture we approach the question of education again. It is necessary for us to examine two features of parental training on which the book of Proverbs lays repeated stress. First, the need of method in bringing up the young; and second, the way of punishing their delinquencies.

In the first we have an eternal principle, which applies and must apply as long as human nature endures, a principle which is even emphasized by the demands of our Christian faith. In the second we have a principle which is so modified and altered by the Christian spirit, that unless we make the largest allowance for the change, it may be, as it often has been, misleading and hurtful in a high degree. If we could trace out all the dark cruelties and injustice, the vindictiveness, the stupidity of parents, guardians, and teachers,

who have sheltered themselves under the authority of the text, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him,"[1] we might read with a new application our Saviour's stern censure of accepting the letter of Scripture in place of coming to Him and learning of Him who is meek and lowly of heart.[2]

But our first duty is to understand the wholesome and eternally valid teaching that is here given us about education. "Train up a child in the way he should go." We gain a good deal in vividness if we go back to the meaning of the word which is rendered "train." Derived from a noun which signifies the palate and the inner part of the mouth, its literal meaning is "to put into the mouth." The metaphor suggested is that of feeding an infant. Every parent recognises the necessity of giving to the helpless children suitable nourishment. At first the mother feeds the babe at the breast. After the weaning she still feeds it with food carefully chosen and prepared. As the child grows older she changes the food, but she does not relax her care; and the father admits the responsibility of procuring the necessary diet for his little one, a responsibility which does not cease until the child is fully grown, fully formed, and fully able to provide for himself. Here is the suitable analogy for mental, moral, and spiritual teaching. The parents must feed their child with morsels suitable to his age, with the "milk of the word" at first, afterwards with strong meat. It all requires infinite care and forethought and wisdom, for there is a certain way of development, a certain ideal which the

[1] Prov. xxii. 15. [2] John v. 39.

child must realize, and if the training is to be on the lines of that development, according to that "way," if it is to achieve that ideal, the teaching must all be accurately adapted to the age or stage of development, and to the particular character and disposition of the child. If the preliminary work of the parents is wisely done, if the influence exercised by them while their child is still entirely in their hands is exactly what it ought to be, there is no fear for the rest of life—"when he is old he will not depart from it." A great master of modern literature, who wandered through many ways of thought far from the opinions and faith of his parents, when in his old age he sat down to write the reminiscences of his life, discovered that the original bent given to his mind by his peasant parents had remained unexhausted to the end.[1] Many beliefs currently held had faded and grown dim, much of the historical foundation of his religion had crumbled away, but there was a truth which he had learned from his mother's lips and had seen exemplified in his father's life, and it returned to him in its full force, and remained unsubmerged in the tides of doubt, unaffected by the breath of change, it even acquired a fresh hold upon him in the decline of his days:—The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.

It is a good illustration of the unrivalled power of the parents over a man's life. "The Lord hath given the father honour over the children, and hath confirmed the authority of the mother over the sons," says Eccle-

[1] "I am the eldest child, born in 1795, December 4th, and trace deeply in myself the character of both parents, also the upbringing and example of both."—*Carlyle's Reminiscences*, vol. i., p. 54.

siasticus.[1] It is a rare opportunity which is given to parents. No sphere of influence which they may acquire can be like it; it may be wider, but it can never be so intense or so decisive. A father who abdicates the throne on which God has set him, who foregoes the honour which God has given him, or turns it into dishonour, must one day answer for his base renunciation before the Eternal Father. A mother who uses the authority over her sons which God has given her, merely to gratify her own vanity and selfishness, and to retain a love which she has ceased to deserve; or one who wantonly throws away the authority because its exercise makes large demands upon the spirit, has much to answer for at the Divine judgment-seat. Parental powers are so absolute, parental possibilities are so great, parental joys are so rare and wonderful, that they must of necessity be balanced by corresponding disadvantages in case of failure. "He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow, and the father of a fool hath no joy."[2] "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him."[3] It must therefore constantly press upon all wise parents, how are they to act, what methods are they to adopt, in order to rightly discharge their duties, and to win that precious reward of "a wise son"?[4] "My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall be glad, even mine, yea, my reins shall rejoice when thy lips speak right things." "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice, and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him."[5]

The answer which is constantly suggested by the

[1] Eccles. xxx. 2.
[2] Prov. xvii. 21.
[3] Prov. xvii. 25, xix. 13, 26.
[4] Prov. xv. 20. *Cf.* x. 1, xxvii. 11, xxix. 3.
[5] Prov. xxiii. 15, 16, 24.

book of Proverbs, and especially by our text, is this:—A successful parent will be one who makes the training of the children a constant and religious study. It is the last subject in the world to be left to haphazard. From the first a clear aim must be kept in view. "Is my great object that this boy shall be a true, a noble, a God-fearing man, serving his day and generation in the way God shall appoint? Is this object purged of all meaner thought? Can I renounce the idea of worldly success for him, and be indifferent to wealth and reputation, to comfort and ease for him?" When this question is satisfactorily settled, then comes a second, How is the aim to be realized? Is not the parent at once driven to God with the cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" A mistake may be so fatal, and it is so hard to clearly see, to rightly judge, to firmly act, that nothing can avail but the direct teaching, inspiration, and power of the Spirit of God. Happy are the father and the mother who have been forced in their helplessness to seek that Divine help from the very first!

If we only knew it, all education is useless apart from the Spirit of God. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." And liberty is just what is most needed. Mechanical schemes, cut-and-dried precepts, are quite insufficient. Moving in the liberty of the Spirit you have insight and adaptiveness; at once you perceive that each child is a separate study, and must be approached in a different way. One is sanguine and over-confident, and he must constantly be humbled; another is diffident and desponding, and must be encouraged with the bright word of sympathy, spoken at the right moment. "I see it all, my child;

I know what a fight it is in which you are engaged."[1] One is a born sceptic, and would know the reason why; he must be met with patient and comprehending arguments according to his mental powers. Another has no speculative instincts, and questions have to be raised, doubts suggested, in order to save him from drifting into the easy-going acceptance of everything which he is told. One seems naturally inclined to be religious, and must be carefully watched lest the sensitiveness should become morbid, and a dominant thought should lead to mania, melancholy, or a possible reaction. Another seems to have no religious instinct, and the opportunity must be sought for awaking the sense of need, rousing the conscience, opening the eyes to God.

But again, in proportion as parents are led by the Spirit, and make their sacred charge a matter of constant and beseeching prayer, they will in their own person and conduct represent God to the children, and so supplement all the possible defects of the express training and discipline. If the command "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long"[2] is to have any weight with a child, he must live with those who themselves are in the fear of the Lord all the day long. A man must live near to God if he is to make God real to his children. A mother must hold very real converse with her Lord if His reality is to become obvious to her little ones. "As a child," says one,[3] "I always had a feeling that God and Jesus were such particular friends of mamma's, and were honoured

[1] See that invaluable little book, "The Education of a Christian Home," edited by Ella S. Armitage.

[2] Prov. xxiii. 17.

[3] "The Education of a Christian Home."

more than words could tell." If such an impression is to be created, depend upon it God and Jesus must *be* particular friends of yours. No talk, however pious, can create that impression unless the hallowed friendship actually exists.

Again, led by the Spirit, we are filled with Divine love; and no training of children can have any valuable or permanent effect which does not issue from, which is not guided by, and does not result in, love. For love is the Divine educator. It is this which accounts for the frequently observed anomaly that children who seem to have inferior home advantages and very inadequate education turn out better than others for whom no labour or expense or care seems to be grudged. If love is not there, all the efforts will fail. Love is the only atmosphere in which the spirits of little children can grow. Without it the wisest precepts only choke, and the best-prepared knowledge proves innutritious. It must be a large love, a wise love, an inclusive love, such as God alone can shed abroad in the heart. Love of that kind is very frequently found in "huts where poor men lie," and consequently the children issuing out of them have been better trained than those whose parents have handed them over to loveless tutors or underlings.

And this may perhaps fitly lead us to consider the other point which is before us—the prominence which is, in the Proverbs, given to chastisement. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes."[1] "Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope, and set not thy heart on his destruction."[2]

[1] Prov. xiii. 24. [2] Prov. xix. 18.

"Stripes that wound are a cleansing of evil, strokes of the recesses of the belly."[1] "Withhold not correction from the child; when thou beatest him with a rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol."[2] "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother."[3] "Correct thy son and he shall give thee rest, yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul."[4]

Corporal punishment seems to the Christian, and to the common sense of a society which is the product of the Christian spirit, degrading, brutalising, and essentially futile! It can only have even a modicum of good effect where it is inflicted by a loving hand, and in a loving spirit, without a trace of temper or cruelty, and obviously costing more to inflict than to bear. But even with all these conditions granted it is a most unsatisfactory method of punishment; it arouses vindictive feelings and savage passions. A whipped boy is almost sure to bully the next creature weaker than himself that he encounters; and acting only as a deterrent, it never reaches the conscience, or creates a sense of revolt from the sin for the sin's sake, which is the object of all wise, or at least of all paternal, punishment. We can only, therefore, set aside the precept to use the rod as one which was in harmony with darker and harder times before the Saviour of the world had come to reveal the inner life and to teach us how we are to deal with those mysterious and wonderful beings, our fellow-creatures.

But with this modification, and substituting "wise and merciful punishments" for "rod and stripes,"

[1] Prov. xx. 30.
[2] Prov. xxiii. 13, 14.
[3] Prov. xxix. 15.
[4] Prov. xxix. 17.

these teachings remain of permanent validity. Our Heavenly Father chastens His children; by most gracious punishments He brings home to them the sense of sin, and leads them to repentance and amendment.[1] And earthly parents, in proportion as they are led by the Spirit and filled with love, will correct their children, not for their own pleasure, but for their children's good. The truth which underlies these apparently harsh injunctions is this: Love inflicts punishments, nor are any punishments so severe as those which Love inflicts; and only the punishments which Love inflicts are able to reform and to save the character of the delinquent.

We all of us know that weak and sentimental nature —too common among modern parents—which shrinks from inflicting pain under all circumstances. Seizing on the ill-understood doctrine that Love is the sovereign power in life and in education, it pleads in the name of Love that the offender may be spared, that he may escape the due penalty of his fault. That is not a love like God's love: and if you are careful to observe, it has not the remedial or saving effect which the love of God has. "He that declines to punish his child hates him; he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." In the poor child's heart so much foolishness is bound up, so much wilfulness and temper, so much vanity and pride, so much sensuality and selfishness, so much unwholesome craving for amusement, it is so natural to the child to make pleasure the be-all and the end-all of life, that, if all this foolishness is to be driven away,

[1] Lev. xxvi. 41: "If then their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember My covenant with Jacob."

there must be much sharp discipline and painful correction. The Divine method of punishment seems to be to let men eat of the fruit of their doings until they loathe it. They rebelliously call out for meat in the wilderness, and it turns into a satiety, a bitterness, and a plague, while it is between their teeth. Is it possible that parents too, under the guidance of the Spirit, may chasten their children in the same way, bringing home to the wilful the painful effects of wilfulness, to the vain the ridiculous effects of vanity, to the selfish the disastrous issue of selfishness, to the sensual the ruin and the misery of sensuality? Might not the most effectual punishment for every fault be an enforced quiet in which the culprit is confronted with the inevitable outcome of the sin? Does not even the hardest heart begin to melt, does not the dullest conscience begin to grow sensitive, when the sure results of evil are aptly pourtrayed before the mind? What pride would have courage to grow if it had a glimpse of the hard, dry, loveless, unloved, heart which is its inevitable fruit? What young man would venture to take the first downward steps in impurity if he had ever formed a conception of the devastation of brain and heart and life which must ensue?

The rod cannot open the eyes; it can but set the cunning intellect to work to find a way of enjoying the sin and escaping the rod. But the opening of the eyes —at which all true punishment must aim—reveals a rod which is bound up with the sin, sure as the sin itself. It is the parents' solemn task—and many an inward sorrow must it cost—to bring home to his child's heart these truths of experience which the child cannot at present know. Wise penalties and "reproof

give wisdom, but a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother."[1]

There is a voice, the voice of Divine Wisdom, which speaks continually to every parent, to every teacher of youth: "Incline thine ear," it says, "and hear the words of the wise, and apply thy heart unto my knowledge"—without attention and application this heavenly wisdom cannot be known. "For it is a pleasant thing," so the voice continues, "if thou keep these words within thee, if they be established together upon thy lips. That thy trust may be in the Lord,"—without whom the best-meant efforts will fail,—"I have made them known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make thee know the certainty of the words of truth, that thou mayest carry back words of truth to them," those helpless and ignorant children whose needs "send thee" to me for instruction?[2]

The failures are numerous, disastrous, heart-breaking, but they are unnecessary. Your children are holy; they belong to the Saviour in whom you yourselves believe. Grasp that truth; go to Him in sublime faith. "Lord, it is not with Thee to save a part, to choose this one and save that. Thou wilt glorify Thyself in every one."[3] Surrender yourself to Him that He may use you to exhibit His Divine graces and saving love to the children. Live with Him daily, that the glory of the communion may not pass away from your face, or appear only by fits and starts—and so train up your child according to his way; and when he is old he will not depart from it.

[1] Prov. xxix. 15. [2] Prov. xxiii. 17-21.
[3] "The Education of a Christian Home."

XXIV.

FORGIVING.

"Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause, and deceive not with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."—PROV. xxiv. 28, 29.

"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thy heart be glad when he is overthrown, lest the Lord see it and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him."—PROV. xxiv. 17, 18.

"He that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished."—PROV. xvii. 5.

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee."—PROV. xxv. 21, 22.

THERE is no subject on which the teaching of the Proverbs more strikingly anticipates the morality of the New Testament than that of forgiveness to our enemies. Our Lord Jesus Christ could take some of these sayings and incorporate them unchanged into the law of His kingdom, for indeed it is not possible to surpass the power and beauty and truth of the command to feed those who have injured us if they are hungry, to give them drink when they are thirsty, and in this Divine way to kindle in them repentance for the injury which they have done. This is the high-water mark of moral excellence. No better state can be desired. When a human spirit is habitually in this

tender and forgiving mood, it is already united with the Father of spirits, and lives.

It is almost superfluous to point out that even the saints of the Old Testament fall very far short of the lofty standard which is here set before us. The Psalmist, for example, is thinking of coals of a quite different sort when he exclaims: "As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. Let burning coals fall upon them; let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits that they rise not up again."[1] That is the old elemental hate of human nature, the passionate, indignant appeal to a righteous God against those who have been guilty of a wrong or an injury. Even Jeremiah, one of the latest, and certainly not the least holy, of the prophets could cry out concerning his enemies: "Yet, Lord, Thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me; forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from Thy sight; but let them be overthrown before Thee; deal Thou with them in the time of Thine anger."[2] Words painfully natural, words echoed by many a persecuted man of God, but yet quite inconsistent with the teaching of the Saviour in the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching already foreshadowed in this beautiful proverb.

But it may not be superfluous to notice that the Proverbs themselves, even those which stand at the head of this chapter, do not all touch the high-water mark of xxv. 21. Thus, for example, the motive which is suggested in xxiv. 18 for not rejoicing in the fall of an enemy is none of the highest. The idea seems to be, if you see your enemy undergoing punishment, if

[1] Psalm cxl. 9, 10. [2] Jer. xviii. 23.

calamity is falling upon him from the Lord, then do not indulge in any insolent exultation, lest the Lord should be offended with you, and, in order to chastise your malignity, should cease to plague and trouble him. In such a view of the question, God is still regarded as a Nemesis that will resent any unseemly rejoicing in the calamity of another;[1] in proportion therefore as you wish to see your enemy punished, you must abstain from that joy in his punishment which would lead to its diminution. From a precept of that kind there is a vast moral stride to the simple prohibition of retaliation, announced without any reason given or suggested in xxiv. 29—"Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." And from this again there is an incalculable stride to the positive spirit of love, which, not content with simply abstaining from vindictiveness, actually turns the tables, and repays good for evil, looking with quiet assurance to the Lord, and the Lord alone, for recognition and reward. Our wonder is occasioned not because all the Proverbs do not reach the moral altitude of this one, but rather that this one should be so high. When an ideal is set up far in advance of the general practice and even of the general thoughts of the time, we can ascribe it only to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

It needs no proof that forgiveness is better than revenge. We all know that—

> "Revenge, at first though sweet,
> Bitter ere long back on itself recoils."[2]

We all know that the immediate effect of forgiving our

[1] Prov. xvii. 5*b*.

[2] *Paradise Lost*, ix., 171.

enemy is a sweet flow of tenderness in the soul, which surpasses in delight all the imagined joys of vindictiveness; and that the next effect is to soften and win the foe himself; the scornful look relents, the tears of passion give place to those of penitence, the moved heart is eager to make amends. We all know that nothing more powerfully affects our fellow-men than the exhibition of this placable temper.[1] We all know that in forgiving we share God's prerogative, and come into harmony with His Spirit.

Yet here is the melancholy fact that notwithstanding this proverbial truth, taken up into the teaching of our Saviour, and echoed in the writings of His Apostles,[2] even in a Christian society, forgiveness is almost as rare as it was in the days of King Solomon. Men are not ashamed—even professing Christians are not ashamed—to say about their enemies, "I will do so to him as he has done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." We even have a lurking admiration for such retaliatory conduct, calling it spirited, and we still are inclined to contemn one who acts on the Christly principle as weak or visionary. Still the old bad delight in seeing evil fall on the head of our enemies glows in our hearts; still the act of vengeance is performed, the bitter retort is given, the abusive letter is written, with the old sense of unhallowed pride and triumph. How is this? Ah, the simple truth is

[1] Burke said of Pitt after his fall, that the manner in which he made his own justification, without impeaching the conduct of his colleagues or taking any measure that might seem to arise from disgust or opposition, set a seal upon his character. (Lecky, "England in the Eighteenth Century," vol. iii., 61.)

[2] See Rom. xii. 20.

that it is a small matter to get right principles recognised, the whole difficulty lies in getting them practised. We need a power which can successfully contend against the storm of passion and self-will, in those terrible moments when all the calm lights of reason are quenched by the blinding surf of passion, and all the gentle voices of goodness are drowned by its roaring waves.

Sometimes we hear it said that the moral teaching of Christ is not original, but that all His precepts may be found in the words and writings of ancient sages, just as His teaching about forgiveness is anticipated by the proverb. Yes, but His claim does not rest upon His teaching, but upon the Divine and supernatural power which He has at His command to carry out His doctrines in the conduct of His disciples. This is the point which we must realize if this sweet and beautiful ideal is to be worked out in our lives. We have but touched the fringe of the question when we have conned His words, or shaped conceptions of what a life would be passed in conformity to them. The centre of Christian doctrine is *power*, the power of Christ, the fountain of living waters opened in the heart, the grafting of the withering branches upon a living stock, the indwelling of Christ Himself, as the spring and principle of every holy action, and the effectual restraint on all our ungovernable passions.

But before looking more closely at this, we ought to pay some attention to the constant motive which our Lord, even in His teaching, presents for the practice of a forgiving disposition. He always bases the duty of forgiveness on the need which we have of God's forgiveness; He teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our

trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and in the moving story of the unmerciful servant, who demanded the full payment from his fellow-servant just when his lord had pitifully remitted his own debt, He tells us that forgiveness of our enemies is an indispensable condition of our being forgiven by God. "His lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also My Heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."[1] It is not therefore only, as it is sometimes stated, that we ought to be moved to pity by remembering what God has done for us. No, there is a much sterner thought in our Lord's mind; it is that if we do not forgive we shall not and cannot be forgiven. The forgiving spirit manifested to our fellow-men is that without which it is vain for us to come near and to ask God for pardon. If we have come, and are just about to offer our prayer, and if we then remember that we have aught against a brother, we must go first and be reconciled to him, before our prayer can be so much as heard.

Here is certainly a motive of a very powerful kind. Which of us would dare to cherish the bitter thought, or proceed with our plan of vengeance, if we remembered and realized that our vindictiveness would make our own pardon at the hands of God impossible? Which of the countless deeds of retaliation that stain with blood the pages of history would have been perpetrated, and which of the perpetrators would not have tremblingly relinquished all thought of reprisals, if they had seen that in those savage acts of vengeance

[1] Matt. xviii. 35.

they were not, as they supposed, executing lawful justice, but actually cutting off their own hope of pardon before the throne of God?

If we avenge ourselves, if society is constantly torn by the quarrels and the mutual recriminations of hostile men whose one thought is to give as good as they have got, it can only be because we do not believe, or do not realize, this solemn teaching of the Lord. He seems a faint and doubtful voice compared with the loud tumult of passion within; His authority seems weak and ineffectual compared with the mighty domination of the evil disposition. Powerful, therefore, as the motive is to which He constantly appeals, if He had left us nothing but His teaching on the subject we should not be materially better off than they who listened with attention to the teaching of the wise authors of these ancient Proverbs. What more has He left us?

It is His prerogative to give to those who believe in Him a changed heart. How much is meant by that, which only the changed heart can know! Outwardly we seem much alike; outwardly there is little sign of an inward transformation; but far as the east is from the west is the unregenerate heart from the regenerate, the Christless heart from one which He has taken in His hands, and by His great redemption created anew. Now without stopping to follow the processes of faith by which this mighty change is effected, let us simply mark the characteristics of the change so far as it affects the matter in hand.

The first and most radical result of the New Birth is that God takes the place which Self has occupied. All the thoughts which have clustered about your own

being now turn to His Being, as stray fragments of iron turn to the magnet. Consequently, all the emotions and passions which are stimulated by self-love give place to those which are stimulated by the love of God. It is as if the pipes of your aqueduct had been changed at the fountain head, disconnected from the malarious waters of the marsh, and connected with the pure and sparkling water of the hills. God's ways of regarding men, God's feelings towards men, His yearning over them, His pity for them, flow into the changed heart, and so preoccupy it that resentment, hatred, and malice are washed out like the sour dregs in a cup which is rinsed in a running stream.

There is the man who did you the wrong—very cruel and unpardonable it was!—but, as all personal elements are quite out of the question, you regard him just as if you were not the injured being. You see him only as God sees him; you trace all the malignant workings of his mind; you know how the fire of his hate is a fire which burns the heart that entertains it. You see clearly how tormenting those revengeful passions are, how the poor soul mastered by them is diseased, how the very action in which it is triumphing now must become one day a source of bitter regret and implacable self-reproach; you soon begin to regard the ill deed as a shocking wound inflicted on the doer of it, and the wells of pity are opened. As if this enemy of yours had been quite innocent of all ill-will, and had been overtaken by some terrible calamity, your one instinctive thought is to help him and relieve him. Out of the fulness of your heart, without any sense of being magnanimous, or any thought of a further end,—simply for the pity of it,—you come to

proffer him bread in his hunger and water in his thirst.

Yes, it is in the atmosphere of pity that personal resentment dies away, and it is only by the power of the Son of Man that the heart can be filled with a pity large enough to pardon all the sins of our kind.

It is this thought—though without any definite statement of the means by which it is produced—that finds expression in Whittier's touching lines :—

> "My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
> Abused, its kindness answered with foul wrong;
> So turning gloomily from my fellow-men,
> One summer Sabbath day I strolled among
> The green mounds of the village burying-place;
> Where pondering how all human love and hate
> Find one sad level; and how, soon or late,
> Wronged and wrongdoer, each with meekened face,
> And cold hands folded over a still heart,
> Pass the green threshold of a common grave,
> Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart,
> Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
> Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
> Swept all my pride away, and, trembling, I forgave."

Yes, one who is touched by the spirit of the Son of Man finds too much to pity in the great sorrowing world, and in its fleeting and uncertain life, to cherish vengeful feelings. Himself redeemed by the untold love of His Father, by the undeserved and freely offered pardon in Christ Jesus his Lord, he can feel for his enemies nothing but forbearance and love; if they too are Christians, he longs to win them back to the peace and joy from which their evil passion must have driven them; and if they are not, his eyes must fill with tears as he remembers how brief is their apparent triumph, how unsubstantial their gleam of joy. The

desire to save them immediately masters the transitory wish to punish them. The pity of men, for the sake of the Son of Man, wins the day.

And now we may just glance at the effect which the Christly conduct has upon the offender, and the reward which God has attached to its exercise.

It is one of the most beautiful traces of God's likeness in even bad men, a characteristic to which there is no parallel in the animal creation, that though passion awakes passion, wrath wrath, and vengeance revenge —so that savages pass their whole time in an unbroken series of blood feuds, the hideous retaliation bandied from tribe to tribe and from man to man, generation after generation—the spirit of meekness, proceeding not from cowardice, but from love, disarms passion, soothes wrath, and changes vengeance into reconciliation. The gleam of forgiveness in the eye of the injured is so obviously the light of God that the wrongdoer is cowed and softened before it. It kindles a fire in his spirit, his heart melts, his uplifted hand falls, his angry voice grows tender. When men are so dehumanised as to be insensible to this softening effect, when they interpret the gentleness as weakness, and are moved by the forgiving spirit simply to further injury and more shameless wrong, then we may know that they are possessed,—they are no longer men,—they are passing into the category of the lost spirits, whom the forbearance of God Himself leads not to repentance but only to added sin.

But if you have ever by the sweet spirit of Christ so mastered your natural impulse as to return good for evil lovingly and whole-heartedly, and if you have seen the regenerating effect in the beautiful subjugation of your foe and his transformation into a friend, it is

not necessary to say much of the reward which God has in store for you. Do you not already possess it?

Yet the reward is certainly greater than you are able at once to apprehend. For what a secret is this which you possess, the secret of turning even the malignity of foes into the sweetest affection, the secret which lay in the heart of God as the spring and the means of man's redemption.[1] The highest reward that God can give to His creatures is to make them partakers of His nature as He has made them in His own image. When we share in a Divine attribute we enter so far into the Divine bliss; and in proportion as this attribute seems removed from our common human nature, our spirit must exult to find that it has been really appropriated. What further reward, then, can he who avenges not himself desire? The pulse of the Divine heart beats in him; the tides of the Divine life flow through him. He is like God—God who opposes to man's ingratitude the ocean of His pardoning love; he is conscious of that which is the fountain of joy in the Divine Being; surely a man must be satisfied when he awakes in God's likeness! And that satisfaction comes to every one who has heaped coals of fire on his enemy's head by feeding him in his hunger, and giving him water when athirst. Say not, "I will do so to him as he has done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." Love your enemies; pray for them which despitefully use you.

[1] *Cf.* the proverb, "When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7).

XXV.

THE KING.

"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of *kings* is to search out a matter.
The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of *kings* is unsearchable.
Take away the dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the finer;
Take away the wicked from before the *king*, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.
Put not thyself forward in the presence of the *king*, and stand not in the presence of great men:
Far better is it that it be said unto thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the *prince* whom thine eyes have seen."—PROV. XXV. 2-7.

IT will be remembered that in the book of Samuel there are two accounts of the monarchy and its origin lying side by side,—different, and to all appearance irreconcilable. One set of passages seems to imply that the king was appointed by God's holy purpose to fulfil the objects of His government. But another set of passages seems to represent the outcry for a king as a rebellion against the sovereignty of the Lord, and the appointment of a king as a punishment for the people's sin. It is in agreement with the first idea that provision is made in the Law for a monarchical government; but it is in agree-

ment with the second idea that the actual kings prove to be for the most part incompetent and faithless rulers, "who do evil in the sight of the Lord," and that even the best of them fall into gross sins, or are at any rate guilty of grave errors. Thus David stumbled into a miry pit; Jehoshaphat experienced defeat in his alliance with Ahab; Josiah was slain at the battle of Megiddo; Uzziah was smitten with leprosy; and Hezekiah committed an imprudence which incidentally brought the great calamity upon his country. So it is all through.

Now the only satisfactory explanation that this twofold aspect of the kingship seems to admit of is one which goes deep down into the prophetic and inspired character of Israel and its history. The king in his ideal aspect is throughout a type and a foreshadowing of the Anointed One that was to come; and the actual failure of all the kings to realize the ideal, to govern wisely, to establish righteousness, or even to observe the moral law in their own persons, necessarily threw men's thoughts forward to Him who should sit upon the throne of David, and carry out in ways not yet realized or even conceived the noble and exalted ideas which clustered round the theocratic throne. Many hasty critics have been swift to see and to censure the ignoble failures of the men who sat upon the thrones of Judah and Israel; some critics have developed with sufficient clearness the noble ideal which always underlay the monarchy even in the moments of its deepest decline. But comparatively few have seen the significance of this contrast between the ideal and the actual; and consequently only a few have perceived with what a prolonged and emphatic voice the whole story of the Kings spoke of Christ.

The contrast just pointed out in the historic books appears with equal distinctness in this book of Wisdom; the proverbial sayings about the king exhibit the two-fold thought; and the reconciliation is only found when we have realized the Kingship of Christ and can bring that idea to explain the ancient forecast. Thus the study of the things concerning the king is to the thoughtful reader of the Proverbs a study of the things concerning Christ. The ideal elements speak of Him; the actual shortcomings cry out for Him.

First we will review what is said to the glory and honour of the king. He comes before us as the embodiment of righteousness.[1] "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness, for the throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him that speaketh right."[2] "A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment winnoweth away all evil with his eyes. . . . A wise king winnoweth the wicked and bringeth the threshing wheel over them."[3] As he purges the wicked, so he encourages the righteous: "He that loveth pureness of heart hath grace on his lips, the king shall be his friend."[4] There is a great severity in his government: "The wrath of a king is as

[1] It will be observed that, speaking generally, the early proverbs present the more favourable side of the kingship, and the later proverbs suggest a period of decline (see Introduction). Possibly the same test may serve to distinguish the passages in Deuteronomy and the book of Samuel; the brighter thought that the king was originally intended by God may come from the early days when the kings still promised well, and the darker thought which crosses the optimistic picture may emanate from the period when their failure and decline were unmistakable.

[2] Prov. xvi. 12, 13. [3] Prov. xx. 8, 26. [4] Prov. xxii. 11.

messengers of death; and a wise man will pacify it."[1] "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion."[2] On the other hand, his mercy is one with his severity: "His favour is as dew upon the grass."[2] "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain."[3] "Mercy and truth preserve the king, and his throne is upholden by mercy."[4] The fact is that his government is a vice-royalty. He is the human instrument of the Divine Will. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the watercourses"—which the farmer directs and leads over his fields according to his purpose—"he turneth it whithersoever he will."[5] Thus the king expresses precisely the Lord's favour towards a servant that dealeth wisely, and the Lord's wrath against him that causeth shame."[6] The king manifests the Lord's spirit in dealing with the subject, judging the cause of the poor as the Lord does. "The king that judgeth faithfully the poor, his throne shall be established for ever."[7] He is, in a word, a manifestation—a revelation—of God Himself. "The glory of God is to conceal a thing," *i.e.*, to be unsearchable and unknowable, "and the glory of kings is to search a matter out;" the king, searching the deep things of God, and becoming the interpreter of the Divine will to men, is Himself in the place of God to us. "The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings there is no searching." Reflecting the righteousness, the mercy, the power of God, his throne is bathed in the celestial light. "Take away dross

[1] Prov. xvi. 14.
[2] Prov. xix. 12.
[3] Prov. xvi. 15.
[4] Prov. xx. 28.
[5] Prov. xxi. 1.
[6] Prov. xiv. 35.
[7] Prov. xxix. 14.

from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the finer; take away evil from before the king, and his throne shall be fixed in justice."[1]

In the presence of such a sovereign the subject may well abase himself, even the greatest and wisest may count himself small. "Glorify not thyself before a king, and in the place of the great do not stand. For better is it that it be said to thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of a prince whom thine eyes have seen."[2]

Rebellion against such a sovereign is the merest infatuation. "Against him there is no rising up."[3] "The terror of the king is as the roaring of a lion, he that provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own life."[4] "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with them who are given to change; for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the destruction of them both."[5]

It is evident that in all this we have an ideal picture. No king that ever sat on an earthly throne, no David or Hezekiah, no Antoninus or Trajan, no Charlemagne or St. Louis, no Alfred or Edward the First, ever in the faintest degree approached the fulfilment of the ideal. The divinity which hedged them was of quite a different kind from this open vision of God, this human mediatorship, this absolute subjection to the Divine will. And when we leave the select class of great and good kings, and look at the ordinary type of the strong and capable ruler, Saul or Ahab, Alexander or Cæsar, Constantine or Diocletian, Clovis or Rollo, William the Conqueror or

[1] Prov. xxv. 2-5.
[2] Prov. xxv. 6, 7.
[3] Prov. xxx. 31.
[4] Prov. xx. 2.
[5] Prov. xxiv. 21, 22.

Henry II., Louis XIV. or Frederick the Great, the Czar Peter or Napoleon, we see at once that we have passed into a region of thought and action where the description of the Proverbs becomes unreal and visionary.

There is but one way of explaining the language before us. *It points to Christ.* In Him alone is it or can it be realized. He is the only sovereign that has any union with God which is at all like identity. He is the only Ruler who blends with absolute infallibility severity and mercy. Of what other king could it be said that "purity of heart" secures His friendship? What other king has made it his first and supreme object to judge faithfully the poor? What other government but His has sought its security in that essential duty and its fulfilment? It is Christ alone whose favour descends on the heart like dew on the grass, or as a cloud of the latter rain. His is the only rule against which rebellion is more than a political crime, and becomes an actual sin. Of Him alone can it be said with any breadth of meaning or certainty of fulfilment, "Let no falsehood from the tongue be spoken to the King, and no falsehood shall go out of his mouth. A sword is the king's tongue, and that not of flesh."[1] It is only a king absolutely righteous and absolutely merciful that can ever bear down with effective force upon lies and liars. It is only He that would see in lying the prime sin, the incurable disease, the unpardonable treason.

[1] The LXX. of xxiv. 23, which adds a passage not appropriate to Christ, "Whosoever is delivered up to him shall be crushed. For if his temper be exasperated, he consumes men, sinews and all, and crunches their bones, and burns them up as a flame, so that they are uneatable to the young of eagles."

The King is Christ. Before He came there was in the line of His foreshadowing a typical Divine right of kings. But since His coming all such kingships have been anachronisms. The appeal which used to be made to the Old Testament to support that famous political dogma was indeed its surest refutation and condemnation. For all that is said there of the indefeasible prerogative, coupled as it is with an infallibility of judgment, a perfect moral goodness, and an irresistible power, applied and could apply only to Christ. Where absolute monarchy is not Christship it becomes, as so many familiar passages in the Old Testament show, a tyranny and an oppression, a cause of national corruption and decay.

Now this leads us, in the second place, to notice how the actual failure and consequent mischief of the kingship are reflected in the proverbs, and especially those later proverbs which date from the decline and fall of the monarchy. We have only to glance over the books of Samuel and Kings to see what kind of men the occupants of the throne were; few of them show any marked ability, most of them by their folly and stupidity lead their people with hurried strides towards the threatened catastrophe. So far from acting as vicegerents of the Lord, it is their special characteristic that they are the authors of the prevailing religious apostasy. Even the more favourable exceptions, the kings who in the main did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, had not spiritual energy enough to purify the worship and restore the allegiance of their people to the Lord. Now it would be some insolent and witless tyrant who would desolate the country and drive his subjects into revolt. "A raging lion, a ravening

bear, a wicked ruler over a poor people. O prince, that lackest understanding and art a great oppressor, he that hateth rapine shall prolong his days."[1] Now it would be a headstrong prince who would scorn all counsel, and, refusing to be advised, would himself retire from the helm of the state. "Where no wise steering is, the people falleth; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."[2] Setting aside the maxim, "Every purpose is established by counsel, and by wise guidance make thou war,"[3] his purposes would be disappointed.[4] Now the earth would be burdened and tremble with the portent of a servant as king,[5] one who as a servant might be excellent, but once on the throne would reveal all the weaknesses and vices which are essentially servile.[6] Now a liar would occupy the throne, and lying lips ill become a prince.[7] And now, owing to the weakness and folly of the prince, the state would fall into pieces and be torn with wildly contending factions: "For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof, but by a man of understanding and knowledge right will be prolonged."[8] Under the rule of the wicked, population disappears.[9] And while "in the multitude of people is the king's glory, in the want of people is the destruction of the prince."[10] Under the tyrant's sway "the people sigh."[11] Their persons are insecure, and their property is taken from them in the form of forced gifts or benevolences.[12] And as the king,

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Prov. xxviii. 15, 16.

Prov. xi. 15. The image from steering survives in our own governor (gubernator).

[3] Prov. xx. 18.
[4] Prov. xv. 22.
[5] See 1 Kings xvi. 7.
[6] Prov. xxx. 22.
[7] Prov. xvii. 7.
[8] Prov. xxviii. 2.
[9] Prov. xxviii. 12.
[10] Prov. xiv. 28.
[11] Prov. xxix. 2.
[12] Prov. xxix. 4

such are his servants; his readiness to hearken to falsehood renders them all wicked.[1] The atmosphere of the court becomes corrupt: all truth, sincerity, purity disappear. The courtier is afraid to speak his mind, lest jealous listeners should report the words to the monarch's suspicious ear. The very freedom of social life disappears, and the table of the king becomes a trap to the unwary. "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently him that is before thee, and put a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite; be not desirous of his dainties, seeing they are deceitful meat."[2]

Here is the complete and absolute corruption of the Divine royalty. The description holds true age after age; suggested by the decline of the monarchy in Israel, it applies accurately to the Imperial government at Rome, and it might have been written to describe the character and the government of the Stuarts in England. Strong in what they supposed to be their Divine Right, they became liars and hearkened to falsehood; their servants became wicked; their government perished from its own inherent rottenness. The description holds too of the French monarchy from the time of Louis XIV. to its fall. And it would seem, as indeed we may confidently believe, that the slow and imperceptible decay of the faith in the divine right of kings has been

[1] Prov. xxix. 12. *Cf.* Ecclesiasticus x. 2: "As the judge of the people is himself, so are his officers; and what manner of man the ruler of the city is, such are they also that dwell therein."

[2] Prov. xxiii. 1-3. *Cf.* the Eastern adage, "Dainties of a king burn the lips." It was a common occurrence at the court of Pope Alexander VI. to invite an obnoxious person to the Papal table and there dispose of him by means of poisoned food.

in God's hands a long preparation for the reign of Him whose right it is to reign, Jesus Christ, the true King of men.

But there is still one other characteristic cause of the perverted kingship, to which attention is drawn in xxxi. 2-8: "Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes to say, Where is strong drink? Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any that is afflicted." These fleshly vices are peculiarly common and peculiarly ruinous to kings, preventing them from pleading "the cause of such as are left desolate," and from "ministering judgment to the poor and needy."[1] It is in realizing the private life of kings, and in observing how seldom they have practised temperance, chastity, self-control, and how readily their contemporaries and even posterity have dispensed them from these primary obligations, that we plainly recognise the broad divergence between the facts of earthly monarchies and the description of the heavenly monarchy, and thus are prepared to recognise with gratitude and awe the sole sovereignty of Christ. The cry of the Florentines under the temporary excitement created by Savonarola's preaching was, "Jesus is our King, only Jesus." That is the constant and ever-swelling cry of human hearts. The types and shadows fall away; through the forms the spirit becomes apparent. It is Christ that claims and wins and enchains our loyalty. We are His subjects, He is our absolute Lord; we have no king but Jesus.

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[1] Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

There is in every human heart a loyalty which seeks for a fitting object; if it finds no lawful king, it will attach itself to a pretender. What pathos there is in the sacrifice which men have made, and in the deeds which they have dared, for Pretenders who have had no claim upon their devotion or allegiance! "Show me my rightful sovereign," seems to be the implicit demand of us all. And the answer has been given, "Behold, your king cometh unto you," in the lowly person, but commanding majesty, of Jesus. Many have accepted this and have cried, "Blessed is the king that cometh in the name of the Lord."[1]

Shall we not bring our loyalty to Him, recognising the One whom prophets and wise men foretold, and acknowledging in His sway the authority which all other governments, even the best of them, lack? Let no false shame or fear restrain our homage; let not the sneers of those over whom "other lords have dominion" keep our knees from bending, and our tongues from confessing, "The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe. Many seek the ruler's favour,"—their whole thought is to stand well with the powers that be, and to secure the recognition of the Pretender who happens at any given moment to be directing the affairs of the world,—"but a man's judgment cometh from the Lord," his rightful King,[2] and to stand right with Him is all that need concern us. How well the King of men understood that because He came in humility—His birthplace a manger, His throne a fishing-boat or a wayside well, riding not in chariots of state, "but on an

[1] Luke xix. 38. [2] Prov. xxix. 25, 26.

ass, and the foal of an ass;" because His appeal would be, not to the eye, but to the heart; not to the outward, but the inward; not to the temporal, but to the eternal, —men, with their perverted and misapplied loyalties, would reject Him and be ashamed to confess Him. False kingships have dazzled our eyes, and hidden from us the grandeur of a Sovereign who is among us as one that serveth. From the touch of His humiliation we shrink.

But if the heart recognises and owns its lawful Sovereign; if, captivated by His indescribable beauty and bowed before His indisputable authority, it seeks only in profound obeisance and absolute surrender, to worship and adore and serve, how royal is His treatment, how unstinted are His largesses. "Come up hither," He says, bringing the soul higher and higher, into fuller vision, into more buoyant life, into more effectual service. The evil ruler, we saw, made all his servants wicked. Christ, as King, makes all His servants holy, dwelling in them, and subduing their hearts to Himself in ever truer devotion; He through them carries out His vast designs of love in those portions of His dominion where rebels still rise up against Him, and where poor deluded hearts still fretfully cry, "We will not have this Man to rule over us." "In the multitude of people is the king's glory." May God hasten the time when all peoples and tongues shall bow down to and worship our King!

XXVI.

THE FOOL.

"As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool. . . .

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the back of fools.

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off his own feet, and drinketh in damage.

The legs of the lame hang loose: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

As a bag of gems in a heap of stones, so is he that giveth honour to a fool.

As a thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

As an archer that woundeth all, so is he that hireth the fool and he that hireth them that pass by.

As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so is a fool that repeateth his folly.

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."—PROV. xxvi. 1, 3-12.

THIS passage points out certain characteristics of the fool, a term which occurs so frequently in the book of Proverbs that we must try to conceive clearly what is to be understood by it. The difficulty of forming a distinct conception arises from the fact that there are three different words, with different

shades of meaning, all rendered by the one English expression, fool or folly. For want of carefully distinguishing these delicate varieties of the original, some of the proverbs appear in English tautological and almost meaningless. We must try then to separate and to understand these several terms.

The Hebrew word which most frequently occurs in the book to designate fool, אֱוִיל, together with its derivative, which is the usual word for folly, אִוֶּלֶת, signifies weakness. We are to think of that ignorant, inconsiderate, sanguine, and self-confident temper which eschews counsel, which will have its own way, which declines to be governed by reason, which forms fond expectations and baseless hopes, and which is always sure that everything will turn out according to its wish, though it takes no means to secure the desired result. Perhaps the simplest way of describing the habit of mind and the type of character intended by the Hebrew is to use the word *infatuation*. This would not do as a translation in all the passages where it occurs, but it will serve to point out the underlying idea.

The word which comes next in frequency, כְּסִיל,—the word used uniformly throughout the particular passage before us,—has at its root the notion of grossness, the dull and heavy habit of one whose heart has waxed fat, whose ears are slow to hear, and whose higher perceptions and nobler aspirations have succumbed to the sensual and earthly nature. We have to think of moral, as well as mental, stupidity, of insensibility to all that is true and good and pure. The fool in this sense is such a dullard that he commits wickedness without perceiving it,[1] and utters slanders almost

[1] Prov. x. 23.

unconsciously;[1] he does not know when to be silent;[2] whatever is in him quickly appears,[3] but when it is known it is very worthless;[4] nor has he the sense to get wisdom, even when the opportunity is in his hand;[5] his best advantages are quickly wasted and he is none the better.[6] Perhaps the English word which best fits the several suggestions of the Hebrew one is *senseless*.

The third term, נָבָל, occurs only four times in the book. It is derived from a verb signifying to fade and wither. It describes the inward shrinking and shrivelling of a depraved nature, the witlessness which results from wickedness. It contains in itself a severer censure than the other two. Thus "He that begetteth a *senseless* man (כְּסִיל) doeth it to his sorrow, but the father of the *bad fool* (נָבָל) hath no joy."[7] In the one case there is trouble enough, in the other there is nothing but trouble. Thus it is one of the four things for which the earth trembles when a man of this kind is filled with meat.[8] This third character is sketched for us in the person of Nabal, whose name, as Abigail says, is simply the Hebrew word for fool in its worst sense, which fits exactly to its bearer. But dismissing this type of folly which is almost synonymous with consummate wickedness, of which indeed it is the outcome, we may turn to the distinction we have drawn between infatuation and senselessness in order to explain and understand some of the Proverbs in which the words occur.

First of all we may notice how difficult it is to get

[1] Prov. x. 18.
[2] Prov. xii. 23.
[3] Prov. xiv. 33. Prov. xiv. 7.
[5] Prov. xvii. 16.
[6] Prov. xxi. 20.
[7] Prov. xvii. 21.
[8] Prov. xxx. 22.

rid of the folly of infatuation: "Though thou shouldest bray a person possessed of it in a mortar with a pestle among bruised corn, yet will it not depart from him."[1] "It is bound up in the heart of a child,"[2] and the whole object of education is to get it out; but if childhood passes into manhood, and the childish wilfulness, self-confidence, and irrationality are not expelled, the case is well-nigh hopeless. Correction is practically useless; "He must be a thorough fool," it has been said, "who can learn nothing from his own folly;" but that is precisely the condition of the infatuated people we are considering; the only correction of their infatuation is a further increase of it.[3] The reason is practically choked; the connection between cause and effect is lost: thus every ill consequence of the rash act or of the vicious habit is regarded as a misfortune instead of a fault. The wretched victim of his own folly reviles fortune, nature, men, and even God, and will not recognise that his worst enemy is himself. Thus, while the wise are always learning and growing rich from experience, "the infatuation of senseless men is infatuation still."[4] It is this which makes them so hopeless to deal with; their vexation being quite irrational, and always refusing to recognise the obvious facts, is worse than a heavy stone or the piled-up over-

[1] Prov. xxvii. 22. [2] Prov. xxii. 15. [3] Prov. xvi. 22.

[4] Prov. xiv. 24. This seems simpler than supposing that the clause אִוֶּלֶת כְּסִילִים אִוֶּלֶת contains a play upon the possible double meaning of אִוֶּלֶת, which, though it yields an excellent sense,—"the power of fools is only folly," *i.e.*, when they have power they turn it only to a foolish account (*cf.* xxvi. 1),—must be regarded as very obscure, especially seeing that we have no positive instance of אִוֶּלֶת as a derivative of אוּל in the sense of "power."

weight of sand for others to bear.[1] If a wise man has a case with such a person, the ill-judged fury and the misplaced laughter alike make it impossible to arrive at any sound settlement.[2]

The untrained, undisciplined nature, which thus declines the guidance of reason and is unteachable because of its obstinate self-confidence, is constantly falling into sin. Indeed, strictly speaking, its whole attitude is sinful, its every thought is sin.[3] For reason is God's gift, and to slight it is to slight Him. He requires of us a readiness to be taught, and an openness to the lessons which are forced upon us by Nature, by experience, by our own human hearts. This flighty, feather-brained, inconsequential mode of thinking and living, the wilful neglect of all the means by which we might grow wiser, and the confident assurance that, whatever happens, we are not accountable for it, are all an offence against God, a failure to be what we ought to be, a missing of the mark, a neglect of the law, which is, in a word, sin.

But now let us look at the fool in the *second* signification, which occurs in this twenty-sixth chapter so frequently,—the man who has become spiritually gross and insensible, unaware of Divine truths and consequently obtuse to human duties. We may take the proverbs in the order in which they occur. "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool." It is a melancholy fact that the kind of person here referred to is too often found in positions of honour among men. Men rise to distinction in an artificial order of society, not by wisdom, but by

[1] Prov. xxvii. 3. [2] Prov. xxix. 9. [3] Prov. xxiv. 9.

the accident of birth and opportunity; and not unfrequently the ill-placed honour itself leads to that insensibility which is so severely censured. The crass dulness, the perversity of judgment, the unfeeling severity, often displayed by prominent and distinguished persons, are no matter of surprise, and will not be, until human society learns to bring its honours only to the wise and the good. "Delicate living is not seemly for such persons."[1] It is precisely the comfort, the dignity, the exaltation, which prove their ruin. Now it is true that we cannot always trace the effects of this misplaced honour, but we are reminded that it is out of the course of Nature's eternal laws, incongruous as snow in summer, hurtful as rain in harvest. Consequently the due penalty must inevitably come. According to one reading of ver. 2, this penalty which overtakes the exalted fool is thus described:[2] "As the sparrow in her wandering, and the swallow in her flying, so a gratuitous curse shall come upon him." In any case ver. 3 states clearly enough what will eventually happen: "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the back of fools." It is not, of course, that this penalty can be remedial, but Nature herself prepares a "rod for the back of him that is void of understanding;"[3] "As judgments are prepared for scorners, so are stripes for the back of fools."[4] Nor must we only understand this of fools that attain to unnatural honour: there are many dullards and insensates who are not made such by the

[1] Prov. xix. 10.

[2] This is reading לוֹ for אֹו, a constant source of confusion and interchange in Hebrew MSS.

[3] Prov. x. 13. [4] Prov. xix. 29.

stupidity of misdirected admiration, but by their own moral delinquencies; and as surely as the sparrow after flitting about all day returns to her nest in the dusk, or as the swallow in the long summer flight arrives at her appointed place, the punishment of folly will find out the delinquent. It may be long delayed, but an awakening comes at last; the man who hardened his heart, who turned away from the pleadings of God and mocked at His judgments, who chose the vanishing things of time and scorned the large fruition of eternity, discovers his incredible stupidity, and the lash of remorse falls all the more heavily because it is left in the hand of conscience alone.[1] We must never lose sight of the fact that by the fool is not meant the simple or the short-witted; there is in this folly of the proverbs a moral cause and a moral responsibility which involve a moral censure; the senseless of whom we are speaking are they whose "heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart."[2]

We are in the main obliged to leave the insensate to God and their conscience, because it is well-nigh impossible for us to deal with them. They are intractable and even savage as wild animals. "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his infatuation."[3] They are irritated with any

[1] "Quos divi conscia facti
Mens habet attonitos et surdo verbere cædit,
Occultum quatiente animo tortore flagellum."
—Juv., *Sat.*, xiii., 193.

[2] Matt. xiii. 15.

[3] Prov. xvii. 12.

suggestion of spiritual things, indignant with any hint of their own case and its responsibilities. If, on the one hand, you try to approach them on their own ground, to realize their motives and work upon the base ideas which alone influence such minds, you seem to lose all power over them by coming down to their level. "Answer not a fool according to his infatuation, lest thou also be like him."[1] If, on the other hand, you feel bound to convict him of his folly, and to humble him to a sense of his position, you are obliged to use the language which will be intelligible to him. "Answer a fool according to his infatuation, lest he be wise in his own eyes."[2] I recollect one Sunday afternoon passing by a large village public-house, and it chanced that a little group of street preachers were doing their best to make known the Gospel to the idlers who were sitting on the benches outside. Going up to interest the men in what was being said, I was confronted by the landlord, who was in a state of almost frenzied indignation. He denounced the preachers as hypocrites and scoundrels, who lived on the honest earnings of those whom he saw around him. Every attempt to bring him to reason, to show that the men in question spent their money on drink and not on the preachers, to secure a patient hearing for the gracious message, was met only with violent abuse directed against myself. The man was precisely what is meant in these verses by a fool, one in whom all spiritual vision was blinded by greed and sensuality, in whom the plainest dictates of common sense and human courtesy were silenced; to answer him in his own vein was the only way of

[1] Prov. xxvi. 4. [2] Prov. xxvi. 5.

exposing his folly, and yet to answer him in such a way was to come down to his own level. What could be done except to leave him to the judgments which are prepared for scorners and to the stripes which await the back of fools? A fool uttereth all his anger, and facing the torrent of angry words it is impossible to effectually carry home to him any wholesome truth.[1]

We have seen how the kind of man that we are describing is in an utterly false position when any dignity or honour is attributed to him; indeed, to give such honour is much the same as binding a stone in a sling to be immediately slung out again, probably to some one's injury;[2] but he is almost equally useless in a subordinate position. If, for instance, he is employed as a messenger, he is too dull to rightly conceive or correctly report the message. He will almost certainly colour it with his own fancies, if he does not pervert it to his own ends. To receive and to deliver any message accurately requires a certain truthfulness in perception and in speech of which this unfortunate creature is entirely devoid. Thus any one who employs him in this capacity might as well cut off his own feet, as he drinks damage to himself.[3]

It is the awful punishment which comes to us all, when we allow our heart to wax gross, that wisdom itself becomes folly in our lips, and truth herself becomes error. Thus if we know a proverb, or a text, or a doctrine, we are sure to give it a lame application, so that, instead of supporting what we wish to enforce, it hangs down helpless like a cripple's legs.[4] In this

[1] Prov. xxix. 11.
[2] Prov. xxvi. 8.
[3] Prov. xxvi. 6.
[4] Prov. xxvi. 7.

way the insensate corruptness of the Mediæval Church tried to justify the abuse of giving great ecclesiastical preferments to young children by quoting the text, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." Sometimes the result of this culpable stupidity is far more disastrous; it is like "a thorn which runs up into a drunkard's hand," visiting with terrible condemnation those who have misused and perverted the truth,[1] as when Torquemada and the administrators of the Inquisition based their diabolical conduct on the gracious words of the Lord, "Compel them to come in." No, the fool's heart can give no wholesome message; it will turn the very message of the Gospel into a curse and a blight, and by its dull and revolting insensibility it will libel God to man, suggesting that the Infinite Father, the Eternal God, is altogether such an one as these who profess to speak in His name.

The offence of the fool then cannot be condoned on the ground that he is only an enemy to himself. It is his master that he wrongs. As the proverb says, "A master produces all things, but a fool's wages and hirer too pass away."[2] The fool loses what he earns himself: that is true, but he undoes his employer also. One is our Master, even Christ; He hires us for service in His vineyard; when we suffer our heart to

[1] Prov. xxvi. 9.

[2] Prov. xxvi. 10. This rendering Delitzsch obtained by altering the vowel points in the first שׂכר into שָׂכַר, and the sense is good, if a little far-fetched. On the other hand, the received reading gives a plain though a somewhat insipid meaning: "Much produces all,"—whoever has a little and uses it well quickly gets more,—"but he that hires a fool is as he who hires passers by," *i.e.* the employment of a fool is a barren undertaking which practically leads to nothing.

wax dull, when we grow unspiritual, unresponsive, and insensate, it is not only that we lose our reward, but we crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.

And the worst, the most mournful, feature about this fool's condition is that it tends to a perpetual self-repetition: "As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so a fool is always repeating his folly."[1] Every hardening of the heart prepares for a fresh hardening, every refusal of truth will lead to another refusal. Last Sunday you managed to evade the message which God sent you: that makes it much easier to evade the message He sends you to-day. Next Sunday you will be almost totally indifferent. Soon you will get out of reach altogether of His word, saying it does you no good. Then you will deny that it is His word or His message. You pass from folly to folly, from infatuation to infatuation, until at last you can with a grave face accept the monstrous self-contradiction of materialism, or wallow unresisting in the slime of a tormenting sensuality. "As the dog returns to his vomit"!

It must be owned that the condition of the fool seems sufficiently sad, and the gloom is deepened by the fact that our book knows nothing of a way by which the fool may become wise. The Proverbs uniformly regard the foolish and the wise as generically distinct; between the two classes there is a great gulf fixed. There is the fool, trusting in his own heart, incurring stripes, not profiting by them, always the same incorrigible and hopeless creature; and there is the wise man, always delivered, learning from experi-

[1] Prov. xxvi. 11.

ence, becoming better and better.[1] The only suggestion of hope is a comparative one: "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."[2] But there is no tone of confidence about this assurance, because, as we have repeatedly seen, the case of the proud or conceited man is regarded as practically desperate.

No, for comfort and hope in this matter we have to turn away from the Ancient Wisdom to the revealed Wisdom, Christ Jesus. It is He and He alone who practically forbids us to be hopeless about any one. A noble Roman in the time of the Punic Wars received an honourable recognition from the Senate because he had not in the darkest times despaired of the Republic. That is the kind of debt that we owe to the Saviour. He has not despaired of any human being; He will not let us despair. It is His peculiar power, tried and proved again and again, to turn the fool into the wise man. Observing the threefold distinction which is hidden under the word we have been examining, Christ is able to arouse the weak, fond, infatuated soul to a sense of its need. Could there be a better instance than that of the woman at the well,—a foolish creature living in conscious sin, yet full of specious religious talk? Did He not awake in her the thirst for the living water, and satisfy the craving which He had excited? Christ is able to transform the dull and heavy soul, that has suffered itself to be mastered by greed and petrified by selfishness. Was not this what He did to Zaccheus the publican? And

[1] Prov. xxviii. 26; *cf.* ix. 8 and xxiii. 9.
[2] Prov. xxvi. 12.

even with that worst kind of fool, whose heart is withered up within him by reason of sin, and who has learnt to say in his heart that there is no God,[1] the Lord is not helpless. We do not see such an one in the pages of the New Testament, because the folly of Atheism was not among the follies of those times. But in our own day it is an experience by no means uncommon; when an avowed infidel comes under the power of the Gospel, Christ enters into him with the overwhelming conviction that there is a God; Christ shows him how it is sin which has thus obscured the elementary conviction of the human spirit; and, by the direct power of Christ, his heart comes to him again as that of a little child, while in the rapturous joy of believing he lays aside the folly which made him doubt along with the sin which made him unwilling to believe.

[1] נָבָל, Psalm xiv. 1.

XXVII.

LIVING DAY BY DAY.

"Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day will bring forth."—PROV. xxvii. 1.

"The grave and destruction are never satisfied; and the eyes of men are never satisfied;" and LXX. adds, "An abomination to the Lord is he who sets his eye, and undisciplined men uncontrolled in tongue."—PROV. xxvii. 20.

"Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, so he that waits on his Lord eats of the honour."—PROV. xxvii. 18.

HERE is a wholesome lesson for us. We are to trust no future, however pleasant; we are to dwell in no past, however honourable. Life consists of a present, given to us day by day; this is our whole wealth; squandered, it cannot be recovered; neglected, it withers as a leaf. Titus, the Roman Emperor, would say in the evening, when he had omitted his duties or failed in his purposes, *Perdidi diem*, "I have lost a day;"—yes, that lost day is lost for ever; other days may come, but not that one; the duties of that day may be performed afterwards or by other hands, but still the day is lost, because it passed away empty. The thief which cheats us of our days, and beggars us of our wealth, is the specious thought that to-morrow belongs to us. The illusion is as old as the world, but is to-day as fresh and powerful as ever. We have to shake ourselves free of a spell, and awake out of a

dream, to see that when to-morrow comes it is already to-day.

We only begin to live in any true and satisfactory sense when we have learnt to take each day by itself, and to use it as if it were our last, and indeed as if it were our all; dismissing the thought of to-morrow as a mere phantom which for-ever evades our grasp. Life is a mosaic, a large work shaping on the wall or in the dome of some vast cathedral which eye hath not yet seen; and it can only be effectually wrought if, with minute and concentrated care, the little piece of coloured glass which we call To-day is duly fixed into its bedding and fitted exactly to its immediate neighbours. "Why do you work with such intensity?" the great artist was once asked; "Because I work for eternity," was the answer. And that is why each day is of such importance; that is why each day demands all our thought and care: eternity is made up of days, and the present day is all of eternity that we can ever possess.

It is well for us then each morning to take the day fresh from God's hands, and at once to throw our whole soul into it, and to live it with a pure intensity, a sense of solemn and joyful responsibility.

"Oh, Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,
A mite of my twelve-hours' treasure,
The least of thy gazes or glances
(Be they grants thou art bound to or gifts above measure),
One of thy choices or one of thy chances
(Be they tasks God imposed thee or freaks of thy pleasure),—
My Day, if I squander such labour or leisure,
Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me."[1]

But it may be said, Is not this the life of a mere butter-

[1] Browning, *Pippa Passes.*

fly? Is it not the mark of a prudent man to work with his eye on the future,—"Prepare thy work without, and make it ready for thee in the field, and afterwards build thine house"?[1] Is it not just what we have to complain of in the foolish man that he ignores to-morrow, —"A prudent man seeth the evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and suffer for it"?[2]

Here is an apparent contradiction which requires reflection. And the difficulty increases when we remember that most worthy works are the labour of years: an architect lays his plans for a great building which he can hardly hope to see finished in his own lifetime; an author spends days and months and years in the preparation of materials, and must depend on the uncertain future for a time to shape them into a book; a statesman, in proportion as he is wise, avoids what is called a hand-to-mouth policy, and lays his plans with his eye on distant possibilities, well knowing that his immediate actions are liable to misunderstanding, and may prove to be a complete failure unless the opportunity is accorded him of realizing his far-reaching schemes. And, in the same way, youth is spent in education which derives all its value from the expected years of manhood, and all the days of a good life are necessarily a preparation for that which is to come after: we must study in order that we may teach; we must train ourselves for duties which will come upon us, as we may reasonably suppose, in some distant future. Yet our to-morrow is unknown; we are not to boast ourselves of it; we cannot tell what a day may bring forth, and must therefore live only in to-day.

[1] Prov. xxiv. 27. [2] Prov. xxii. 3; xxvii. 12.

Now the solution of this difficulty leads us to one of the profoundest of all spiritual truths. It is this: No life can be worth anything at all apart from the Eternal God, and faith in Him. Life cannot be really lived if it is merely "a measure of sliding sand" taken "from under the feet of the years." Our swift days cannot be effectually and wisely used unless we are linked with Him who embraces in Himself the past, the present, and the future. Our work, whatever it may be, cannot be rightly done unless we are, and know ourselves to be, in the great Taskmaster's sight. The proper use of each day can only be made if we are confident that our times are in His hands; only in this quiet assurance can we have composure and detachment of spirit enough to give our whole strength to the duty in hand. We must be sure that the Master-Artist knows the whole mosaic, and is ordering all the parts, before we can surrender ourselves to the task of putting to-day's piece into its place; we must have complete faith in the Architect who is designing the whole structure, before we can have our mind at leisure from itself to chip our block of stone or to carve our tiny gurgoyle. We can only live in the present, making the most of that which is really ours, on condition that we have God as our Future, relieving us of all anxious care, and assuring to us just strength for to-day.

Thus our text has an implied contrast, which we may draw out in this way: "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth;" but boast thyself in God all the day long,[1]

[1] Psalm xliv. 8.

for thou knowest that He will bring forth righteousness, wisdom, and love continually.

Now let us follow out some of the consequences of this spiritual attitude. Examine the condition of these restless human hearts all around us without God. They are all toiling for to-morrow. Here is one making money, as it is called; he is looking forward to laying aside so many thousands this year; in a few more years he hopes to realize a round sum which will relieve him from the necessity of toil and of further money-making. His eye is set upon that goal. At last he reaches it. Now his desire should be satisfied, but no, "Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied."[1] He does not stay a night at the desired goal; he is off before sunset; all the strain and the fret must be faced over again. Or look at the boundless ambition which possesses godless men; honours achieved only whet their appetite for more. We need not assume that the ambition is unworthy; all we have to notice is its insatiability; in politics, in literature, in art, in social distinction, it is like Sheol and Abaddon,—a maw that ever opens; a gulf that can swallow anything and everything, yet never be filled. The LXX. addition seems to regard this uncontrolled desire as the mark of deficient culture; and, spiritually speaking, no doubt it is. Men without God are always uncultured; they have not found the centre of their being, they have not procured the key-stone to their accumulated knowledge, and it is in consequence, not an arch through which they can travel to any goal, but a confused pile

[1] Prov. xxvii. 20. [2] See heading of chapter.

which blocks the way. These desperate strivings and loud-tongued, undisciplined desires are an abomination to the Lord, because they mar His mighty plan and introduce disorder where He intended order, discord where He intended harmony, deformity where He intended beauty. They are the work of egoism instead of theism.

It is needless to dwell upon the heart-sores and the disappointments which fall to the lot of the people whom we are thinking of. What ghastly mockery the morrows on which they counted prove to be! In some lonely and rocky island, girdled by the moaning of the dreary seas, and cut off from all the interests which gave to life its excitement, egotism ends its days. Or it is on some restless couch, surrounded by all the outward trappings of wealth and power, that the dying spirit cries, "My kingdom for an inch of time!" The man who by his brilliant genius has drawn all his generation after him passes, bearing "through Europe the pageant of his bleeding heart," to a hopeless grave. The woman who has achieved the end of her ambition, ruling the courts of fashion, the acknowledged queen of salons, ends her days with a sense of frustration, cynical in her contempt for the world which was foolish enough to follow and admire her.

But, on the other hand, here is one who boasts himself in God.

> "Lord, it belongs not to my care,"

is the language of his spirit,

> "Whether I die or live;
> To love and serve Thee is my share,
> And that Thy grace must give."

The first thing that strikes you in him in his perfect peace. His mind is stayed on God. The future has no terrors for him, nor has it any joys. God is all in all to him, and God is his now. His treasure is in possession, and moth and rust do not corrupt it, nor can thieves break through or steal. To say that he is contented seems too mild a term for so positive and joyous a calm. But in contrast with the discontent which prevails everywhere outside of God, it is worth while to dilate on this passive virtue of contentment. That endless worry about little things has ceased: he is not annoyed because some one fails to recognise him; he is not affected by the malicious or scandalous things which are said about him; he is not anxious for human recognition, and is therefore never distressed because others are more courted than he is; he knows nothing of that malignant passion of jealousy which is worse than the cruelty of wrath and the flooding of anger;[1] he does not want wealth and he does not dread poverty. He says:—

> "Some have too much, yet still do crave;
> I little have, and seek no more:
> They are but poor though much they have,
> And I am rich with little store:
> They poor, I rich; they beg, I give;
> They lack, I leave; they pine, I live."[2]

When we have entered into this Divine content and are made by our absolute trust in God free from care for the future, it is wonderful how quick we become to see good in apparent evils. To the world this is so incredible that it suspects insincerity, but there is

[1] Prov. xxvii. 4. [2] Sir Edward Dyer (*b.* 1540).

nothing more sincere and more real. A poor child who was blind found the greatest blessing in the affliction, saying, "You see, I can give more to the Missionary Society than the other children, because I can knit in the dark, and have not to spend money on candles." You go to one of God's children expecting to find him broken down and rebellious under some great and undeserved calamity, but you find that he has discovered a blessing in the loss before you get there, and is actually rejoicing, or at any rate he is replying to all provocations, "The Lord gave and the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He is afflicted, but you cannot think of him as afflicted, for "all the days of the afflicted are evil, but he that is of a cheerful spirit hath a continual feast."[1]

Yes, it is that illusive and imaginary morrow that robs us of our peace; it is the misgiving, the anxious care, the dark foreboding. But when we put God our Father in place of the morrow, and know that He comprehends and sees all that we have need of, the peace which passes all understanding settles down upon our spirit, and steals into our eyes, and breathes on our lips, and men perceive even in us why our Father is called "the God of Peace."

The *second* thing which strikes us in those who have learnt to make their boast in God rather than in the morrow is the service which they render to their fellows. This is not only because they are able to turn their undivided attention to the duty which lies nearest, and to do with all their heart what their hand finds to do, but the very spirit of serenity in which they live is a

[1] Prov. xv. 15.

constant help and blessing to all who are around them. It may have been given to you to come into contact with such a soul; in his presence your restlessness dies away, it seems as if your burning brow had been touched with a soothing hand; perhaps "with half-open eyes you were treading the borderland dim 'twixt vice and virtue," and that quiet spirit seemed like a clear shaft of the dawn revealing where you trod; perhaps you were heart-broken with a great sorrow, and the restfulness and confidence of that strong soul gave you an indefinable consolation, hope broke into your heart, and even joy. In receiving that help from what the man *was* rather than from what he gave, you became aware that this was the highest service that any human being can render to another. It is a great thing to succour the physical and material sufferings of men; it is a greater to bring them clear truths and to give them some stimulus and guidance in the intellectual life; but it is greatest of all to communicate spiritual sustenance and power, for that means to bring souls into actual and conscious contact with God.

One of the noblest examples of this service to humanity is furnished in the life and the writings of St. Paul. His personal presence became the new creation of that ancient heathen civilisation, and countless individual souls were, through the inner life which he presented, brought to a complete change and made new creatures in Christ. His writings have been, ever since he died, a constant source of life and strength to many generations of men. He has been misunderstood, "the ignorant and unstedfast have wrested" what he wrote, but none the less he has been to the Church a

perpetual regenerator, and, as a great writer[1] of our own day has declared, "The doctrine of Paul will arise out of the tomb where for centuries it has lain covered; it will edify the Church of the future; it will have the consent of happier generations, the applause of less superstitious ages." Now what is the secret of this power? It is given in his own words, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."[2] He was able to fling himself with that passionate temerity into the present duty, he was able to preach the word with that victorious vigour in season and out of season, just because the whole burden of the unknown future was rolled away from him, and he, more than any man that ever lived, understood what it is to live just for to-day.

Every Christian may possess the same secret; it is the open secret of the Sermon on the Mount; as our gracious Lord told us, we may be as the lilies of the field and as the birds of the air, without anxiety or misgiving, knowing that our Heavenly Father cares for us. It is not given to us all to be great philanthropists, great reformers, great preachers, but it is put within the reach of all to render to others the sweet service of abiding always in trustful and loving submission to God's will, and of shedding upon all the light of our peace.

And this leads us to notice one *last feature* of this true spiritual life. It has an honour of its own, though it is not an earthly honour; it has a reward, though it is not a material reward. "Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, and he that waiteth on

[1] Matthew Arnold. [2] Phil. i. 21.

his master eats of the honour."[1] That is a saying which can only apply in a very modified degree to earthly service and human masters. How many loyal servants of kings have been deserted by their lords at the critical moment, and left to eat the fruit of disgrace and ignominy! But the saying applies in its fulness to our Master Christ and His service. Think of the Christian life under this simple figure; it is like the careful cultivation of the fruit tree. He is the Vine. Our sole concern is to keep in touch with Him, to sit at His feet, to watch for His fruit, to see that no other concern disturbs the quiet relation of perfect loyalty and devotion to Him. Our aim is not to do our own business or seek our own ends, but to be sure that we are always awake to His purposes and obedient to the demands which He makes upon us. It is not ours to reason why, but it is ours to do at all costs whatsoever He bids us do to-day. We have nothing to do with to-morrow; we have no responsibility for the fruit, for no fruit-bearing power lies in us. All we have to do is to keep the fig tree. Now when we abide in this concentrated and whole-hearted devotion to our Master, —when for us to live is Christ,—then honour comes to us unsought, but not unwelcome. The fruit of service is to the taste of the true servant the highest honour that he can imagine. We need no apocalyptic vision to assure us. His word is enough, confirmed as it is by a constant and growing experience. The servants of our Lord already stand before Him, holding in their hands the talents which they have gained for Him; already they hear His gracious "Well done,"

[1] Prov. xxvii. 18.

and the sound of it is more musical in their ears than all the acclamations of their fellow-creatures. This is their honour; what could they have more? they are counted one with Christ; they shared His travail, and now they share His satisfaction and His joy.

And thus those who make their boast in God, and do not boast of the morrow, find that the morrow itself becomes clear to them in the light of His countenance; they do in a sense know what it will bring forth: it will bring forth what they desire, for it will bring forth their Father's will; it will bring forth the victory and the glory of Christ. "Henceforth ye shall see Him coming in the clouds of heaven." Is not that enough? When our hearts have learnt to hanker only after God's will, to desire only Christ's victory, they may boast themselves even of to-morrow; for to-morrow holds in its bosom an assurance of blessing and joy.

XXVIII.

AN ASPECT OF ATONEMENT.

"He that hideth (מְכַסֶּה) his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy."—PROV. xxviii. 13.

"Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief."—PROV. xxviii. 14.

"The fear of the Lord tendeth to life, and he that hath it shall abide satisfied. He shall not be visited with evil."—PROV. xix. 23.

"By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."—PROV. xvi. 6.

THE Hebrew word (כָּפַר) which is used for the idea of atonement is one which originally signifies *to cover*. Sin is a hideous sore, a shocking deformity, which must be hidden from the eyes of men, and much more from the holy eyes of God. Thus the Old Testament speaks about a Robe of Righteousness which is to be thrown over the ulcerated and leprous body of sin. Apart from this covering, the disease is seen working out its sure and terrible results. "A man that is laden with the blood of any person shall flee unto the pit: let no man stay him,"[1] and though blood-guiltiness appears to us the worst of sins, all sin is alike in its issue; every sinner may be seen by seeing eyes "fleeing unto the pit," and no man can stay him

[1] Prov. xxviii. 17.

or deliver him. Or, to vary the image, the sinful man is exposed to the violence of justice, which beats like a storm upon all unprotected heads; he needs to be covered; he needs some shelter, some hiding-place, or he must be swept away.

But the objection which immediately occurs to us is this: what is the use of covering sin if the sin itself remains? The disease is not cured because a decent garment is drawn over the suffering part; indeed, it is not hard to conceive a case in which the covering might aggravate the mischief. If the idea of covering is to be of any service, it must be cleared from all misconception; there is a kind of hiding which may be ruinous, a garment which may drive the disease inward and hasten its deadly operation, a covert from the storm which may crush and stifle the person whom it professes to protect. "He that *covereth* his transgressions," in that way, "shall not prosper." Every attempt to conceal from God or from man or from oneself that one is diseased with sin is ineffectual: every lame excuse which seeks to palliate the guilt; every hypocritical pretence that the thing done has not been done, or that it is not what men usually suppose it to be; every ingenious argumentation which seeks to represent sin as something other than sin, as a mere defect or taint in the blood, as a hereditary and unavoidable weakness, as an aberration of the mind for which one is not responsible, or as a merely conventional and artificial offence,—all such attempts at hiding must be failures, "covering" of that kind can be no atonement. Quite the reverse; this trifling with conscience, this deluded self-righteousness, is the worst possible aggravation of the sin. Hidden in that way, though it be, as it were,

in the bowels of the earth, sin becomes a poisonous gas, more noxious for confinement, and liable to break out in awful and devastating explosions.

The covering of sin[1] which is spoken of in xvi. 6 is of a very different and of a quite particular kind. Combining this verse with the others at the head of the chapter, we may observe that every effectual "covering" of sin in God's sight involves three elements,—confession, forsaking, and a changed practice.

First, there is confession. This appears on the face of it to be a paradox: the only way of covering sin is to uncover it. But it is strictly true. We must make a clean breast of it; we must acknowledge its full extent and enormity; we must spare the patient ear of God no detail of our guilt. The foul, explosive gases must be let out into the open, since every attempt to confine them increases their destructive power. The running sore must be exposed to the Physician's eye, since every rag put over it to hide it becomes steeped in its defiling tides. It is true, confession is a painful and a weary task: it is like removing a heap of dust and refuse by spadefuls,—each bit as it is disturbed fills the atmosphere with choking particles and noisome smells; worse and worse is revealed the farther we go. We came to confess a single fault, and we found that

[1] It may be necessary to point out to the reader that in approaching the subject of atonement from the standpoint of the book of Proverbs, and merely in the expository treatment of the passages before us, the so-called objective ground of atonement in the sacrifice of Christ does not come into view, but its necessity becomes manifest as each step in the exposition reveals how impossible it would be for us, apart from the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, to realize those conditions which are here laid down as indispensable to pardon and acceptance with God.

it was but a broken sherd lying on the foul and pestilential heap. Confession leads to confession, discovery to discovery. It is terribly humiliating. "Am I then so bad as this?" is the horrified cry as each candid admission shows only more and worse that must be admitted. True confession can never be made into a priest's ear,—to men we can only confess the wrongs which we have done to men; but true confession is the awful tale of what we have done to God, against whom only we have sinned and done evil in His sight. It is sometimes urged that confession to a priest gives the penitent relief: possibly, but it is a false relief; since the eye of the priest is not omniscient, the sinner confesses only what he chooses, brings the broken sherd, and receives absolution for that in lieu of removing the whole heap of abominations that underlie. When we have gone as far as we can in laying ourselves bare to man, there remain vast untraversed tracts of our life and our mind which are reserved; "Private road" is written on all the approaches, and trespassers are invariably prosecuted. It is only to God that a real confession can be made, because we know that to Him all is necessarily evident; with Him no subterfuges avail; He traverses those untraversed tracts; there are no private roads from which He is excluded; He knoweth our thoughts afar off.

The first step in the "covering" of sin is to realize this. If our sins are to be really covered they must first be laid bare; we must frankly own that all things are open to Him with whom we have to do; we must get away from the priests and into the hands of the High Priest; we must abjure the confessional and bring God Himself into the secret places of our hearts

to search us and try us and see if there be any evil way in us. The reserve, and the veilings, which every individual cannot but maintain between himself and all other individuals, must be torn away, in full and absolute confession to God Himself.

Secondly. There is a confession, especially that fostered by the habit of confessing to priests, which is unaccompanied by any forsaking of the evil, or any departing from iniquity in general. Many times have men gone to their priests to receive absolution beforehand for the sin which they intended to commit; or they have postponed their confession to their deathbeds, when there will be, as they suppose, no further sins to turn from. Confession of that kind is devoid of all significance; it covers no sins, it really only aggravates them. No confession is of the least avail—and indeed no real confession can be made to God at all—unless the heart turns away from the evil which is confessed, and actually departs at once, so far as it knows and is able, from all iniquity.

The glib language of confession has been and is a deadly snare to multitudes. How easy it is to say, or even to musically chant, "We have done that we ought not to have done; we have left undone that which we ought to have done." There is no pain in such a confession if we once distinctly admit that it is a normal and natural state of mind for us to be in, and that as we say it to-day, so we shall say it to-morrow, and again the next day to the end. But real confession is so painful, and even heart-rending, because it is only of value when we begin from that moment onwards "to do what we ought to do, and to leave undone what we ought not to do." It is well for us, perhaps, to confess

not so much sin in the abstract as our own particular transgressions. Sin is too shadowy a monster for us to definitely avoid and forsake; like death, its kinsman, —Death of whom Milton says:—

> "What *seemed* his head
> The *likeness* of a kingly crown had on,"—

Sin is formless, vague, impalpable. But our own individual transgressions can be fixed and defined; bringing ourselves to the test of the Law, we can say particularly, "This practice of mine is condemned, this habit of mine is sinful, this point of my character is evil, this reticence, this indolence, this reluctance, in confessing Christ and in serving His cause, is all wrong;" and then we can definitely turn our back on the practice or the habit, we can distinctly get rid of the blot in our character, we can fly this guilty silence, rouse ourselves from our selfish indolence. "We live to grow less like what we have been;" and it is this act of the will, this resolute purpose, this loathing what once you loved, and turning towards that which once you ignored,—it is, in a word, the twin process of repentance and conversion, that constitutes the second act in this "covering" of sin. Not, of course, that in a moment the tyranny of old habits can be broken, or the virtue of new activities acquired; but "the forsaking" and "the departing from" are instantaneous exertions of the will. Zaccheus, directly the Lord speaks to him, stands forth, and breaks with his sins, renounces his extortions, resolving to make amends for the past, and enters on a new line of conduct, promising to give the half of his goods to the poor. That is the essential seal of every true

confession: "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh" his transgressions.

Thirdly. This has led us to see that the confession of sins and the conversion from them must issue in a positive practice of mercy and truth, in order to make the process of which we are speaking complete: "By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for."

It is this part of the "covering" which is so easily, so frequently, and so fatally overlooked. It is supposed that sins can be hidden without being removed, and that the covering of what is called imputed righteousness will serve instead of the covering of actual righteousness. To argue against this view theoretically is at the present day happily quite superfluous; but it is still necessary to contend against its subtle practical effects. There is no verity more wholesome and more needed than the one contained in this proverb. Sin may be summed up in two clauses: it is the Want of Mercy and it is the Want of Truth. All our illconduct to our fellow-men comes from the cruelty and hardness of our selfish nature. Lust and greed and ambition are the outcome of pitilessness; we injure the weak and ruin the helpless, and trample on our competitors, and stamp out the poor; our eye does not pity. Again, all our offence against God is insincerity or wilful lying. We are false to ourselves, we are false to one another, and so we become false to the unseen verities, and false to God. When a human spirit denies the spiritual world and the spiritual Cause which can alone account for it, is it not what Plato used to call "a lie in the soul"? It is the deep inward and vital contradiction of consciousness; it is equivalent to saying, "I am not I," or, "That which is, is not."

Now when we have lived in sin, without mercy or without truth, or without both; when our life up to a certain point has been a flagrant selfishness of absolute indifference to our fellows, or a flagrant lie denying Him in whom we live and move and have our being; or when, as is so often the fact, the selfishness and the falseness have gone together, an inextricable and mutually dependent pair of evils, there can be no real covering of the sin, unless selfishness gives place to mercy and falsehood to truth. No verbal confession can possibly avail, no turning from the past iniquities, however genuine for the time, can have any permanent significance, unless the change is a reality, an obvious, living, and working fact. If a man supposes that he has become religious, but remains cruel and selfish, pitiless, unmerciful to his fellow-men, depend upon it that man's religion is vain; the atonement in which he trusts is a fiction, and avails no more than the hecatombs which Carthage offered to Melcarth availed to gain a victory over Rome. If a man counts himself saved, but remains radically untrue, false in his speech, insincere in his professions, careless in his thought about God, unjust in his opinions about men and the world, he is certainly under a lamentable delusion. Though he has, as he thinks, believed, he has not believed to the saving of his soul; though he has undergone a change, he has changed from one lie to another, and is in no way better off. It is by mercy and truth that iniquity can be covered.

Now it will be generally admitted that we do not take the course which has just been described unless we have the fear of God before our eyes. Nothing but the thought of His holiness and the awe which it

inspires, and in some cases even, nothing but the absolute terror of Him who can by no means clear the guilty, moves the heart of man to confession, turns him away from his sins, or inclines him to mercy and truth. When the fear of God is removed from men's eyes they not only continue in sin, but they quickly come to believe that they have no sins to confess; for indeed when God is put out of the question that is in a certain sense true. It is a mere fact of observation, confirmed now by many changing experiences of humanity, that it is "by the fear of the Lord men depart from iniquity;" and it is very significant to notice how many of those who have entirely put away the fear of the Lord from their own eyes have strongly advocated keeping it before the eyes of others as the most convenient and economical police resource.[1] Many fervent free-thinkers are thankful that their opinions are only held by a minority, and have no wish to see the whole of society committed to the cult which they would have us believe is all that their own religious nature requires.

But supposing that any one of us is led into the position of confession and conversion and amendment which is described in these Proverbs: what follows? That person, says the text, "shall obtain mercy." The gracious Father immediately, unconditionally, and absolutely pardons. This is the burden of the Old Testament, and it is certainly not repealed by the New. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us

[1] Voltaire rose once from the table at Ferney, where some atheists were discussing their views. He said he could not let his servants hear this talk, for they would rob and murder him if that was true.

our sins." "Repent, and be converted," said St. Peter to the crowd at Pentecost, "that your sins may be blotted out." The New Testament is indeed on this point the louder and the clearer echo of the Old. The New Testament explains that saying which sounds so strange in the mouth of a perfectly just and Holy God, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake."[1] Human theologies have imagined obstacles in the way, but God never admitted them for a moment. Clear as the truth that the soul which sins should die, was the promise that the soul which turned from its sin, and did that which is righteous in the eyes of the Lord, should live. No earthly father, frankly and unconditionally forgiving his penitent, sobbing child, could be so prompt, so eager as God. While the prodigal is yet a great way off the Father runs to meet him, and hides all his broken confessions in the rush of His embrace.

But we hesitate to admit and rejoice in this grand truth because of an uneasy fear that it is ignoring what is called the Atonement of Christ. It is a very proper hesitation, so long as we settle it within ourselves that these sweet and beautiful utterances of the Old Testament cannot possibly be limited or reversed by that Gospel which came to give effect and fulfilment to them. Is not the solution of any difficulty that has occurred to us to be found here? The sacrifice and the work of Christ create in the human soul those conditions which we have been considering. He came to give repentance unto Israel. It is His patient love in bearing all our infirmities and sins, His mysterious

[1] Isa. xliii. 25.

self-offering on the Cross, that can effectually bring us to confession, conversion, and amendment. Our hearts may have been hard as the nether millstone, but at the Cross they are broken and melted. No stern denunciation of sin has ever moved our stubbornness; but as we realize what sin did to Him, when He became sin for us, the fear of the Lord falls upon us, we tremble, and cry, What shall we do to be saved? Then again, it is His perfect holiness, the beauty of those "stainless years He passed beneath the Syrian blue," which wakes in us the hankering desire for purity and goodness, and makes us turn with a genuine disgust from the sins which must seem so loathsome in His sight. His "neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more," gives us a more burning hatred of sin than all the self-righteous censures and condemnations of the Pharisees. It is in the pages of the Gospels that we have first understood what concrete goodness is; it has risen upon our night like a clear, liquid star, and the passion of it has entered into our souls. And then, finally, it is the Risen Lord, unto whom all power is given in heaven and in earth, that can really transform our nature, flood our heart with love, and fill our mind with truth, so that, in the language of the proverb, mercy and truth may atone for iniquity.

Is it not because Christ by His coming, by His living, by His dying, by His risen power, produces in the believer repentance and confession of sins, conversion and departing from sin, regeneration and actual holiness, that we say He has covered our sins? What meaning can be attached to Atonement apart from its effects? And in what other way, we may ask, could

He really give us such a covering or atonement, than by creating in us a clean heart and renewing a right spirit within us? Sometimes, by a not unnatural confusion of language, we speak of the sacrificial death of our Lord as if it, apart from the effects produced in the believing heart, were in itself the Atonement. But that is not the language of the New Testament, which employs the idea of reconciliation[1] where the Old Testament would employ the idea of atoning; and clearly there can be no reconciliation accomplished between man and God until, not only God is reconciled to man, but man also is reconciled to God. And it is when we come to observe more accurately the language of the New Testament that this statement of the Proverbs is seen to be no contradiction, but an anticipation, of it. Only the regenerate soul, that in which the graces of the Christ-life, mercy and truth, have been implanted by Christ, is really reconciled with God, *i.e.*, effectually atoned. And though the framer of the proverb had but a dim conception of the way in which the Son of God would come to regenerate human hearts and make them in harmony with the Father, yet he saw clearly what Christians have too often overlooked, and expressed tersely what theology has too often obscured, that every effectual Atonement must include in itself the actual, moral regeneration of the sinner.

[1] See Rom. v. 11. This is the only place in the New Testament where even in the Authorised Version the word "atonement" occurs. But the contention of the text is not one of words, but of facts. Whatever terms are used, the Gospels and the Epistles all agree in identifying the salvation of God with an actual and practical righteousness wrought out by the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who believe in Christ as their Saviour.

And further, whoever wrote the verse which stands at the head of our chapter understood what many preachers of the Gospel have left in perplexing obscurity, that God would necessarily, from His very nature, provide the offering and the sacrifice on the ground of which every repentant soul that turns to Him could be immediately and freely forgiven.

XXIX.

THE NEED OF REVELATION.

"Where no vision is, a people casts off restraint, but he that keepeth the law is happy."—PROV. xxix. 18.

THE form of the proverb shows that we are not to treat the vision and the law as opposite, but rather as complementary terms. Visions are, it is true, especially the mark of the prophets, and the law is often confined in a special sense to the Pentateuch; but there is a much wider usage of the words, according to which the two together express, with tolerable completeness, what we mean by *Revelation*. The vision means a perception of God and His ways, and is quite as applicable to Moses as to Isaiah; and, on the other hand, the law covers all the distinct and articulate instruction which God gives to His people in any of His ways of self-communication. "Come ye," says Isaiah,[1] "and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth *the law*, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem;" where the whole context shows that, not the Mosaic Law, but rather a new and particular declaration of the Lord's will, is referred to.

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[1] Isa. ii. 3.

But while the vision and the law are not to be treated as opposites, it is possible to distinguish between them. The vision is the actual contact between God and the human spirit, which is the necessary condition of any direct revelation; the law is the recorded result of such a revelation, either passed from mouth to mouth by tradition, or written permanently in a book.

We may then a little amplify the proverb for the sake of exposition: "Where there is no living revelation, no perceived contact between man and God, there the bonds which hold society together are relaxed or broken; but he that holds by the revelation that has been given, obeying the law, so far as it has been presented to him, happy is he."

Man has need of a revelation; that is the assertion. Society, as an ordered and happy body of men in which each person is rightly subordinated to the whole, and in which law, as distinct from individual caprice, prevails, requires a revealed law. The light of nature is good, but it is not sufficient. The common sense of mankind is powerful, but not powerful enough. In the absence of a real and valid declaration of God's will times must come when the elemental passions of human nature will break out with unrestrained violence, the teachings of morality will be disputed, their authority will be denied, and their yoke will be broken; the links which hold the state and the community together will snap, and the slow growths of ages may disappear in a moment. It is not difficult to show the truth of this assertion from experience. Every people that emerges from barbarism has a vision and a law; a certain revelation which forms the foundation, the sanction, the bond of its corporate existence. When

you can point to a tribe or a group of tribes that know nothing of God, and therefore have no idea of revelation, you at once assure us that the people are sunk in a hopeless savagery. We are, it is true, inclined to deny the term revelation to those systems of religion which lie outside of the Bible, but it is difficult to justify such a contraction of view. God has not left Himself anywhere without a witness. The more closely we examine the multitudinous religions of the earth, the more clearly does it appear that each of them had at its origin a definite, however limited, revelation. The idea of One all-powerful, good, and wise, God is found at the beginning of each faith that can be traced back far enough, and the actual condition of heathen systems always suggests a decline from a higher and a purer religion. We may say, then, with much plausibility, that no lasting and beneficial form of human society has ever existed apart from a vision and a law.

But leaving the wide field of comparative religions, do we not see an illustration of the truth of the text in the European countries which are more subject to our observation? In proportion as a people loses its faith in revelation it falls into decay. This was made manifest in the experience of the French Revolution. When the Jacobins had emancipated themselves from the idea of God, and had come out into the clear light of reason, so terribly did they "cast off restraint" that their own leader, Robespierre, endeavoured with a feverish haste to restore the recognition of God, assuming himself the position of high pontiff to the Supreme Being. The nearest approach that the world has probably ever seen to a government founded on Atheism was this government of the French Revolu-

tion, and a more striking commentary on this text could hardly be desired.

But the need of a revelation can be apprehended, apart from all appeals to history, by simply studying the nature of the spirit of man. Man must have an object of worship, and that object must be such as to command his worship. Auguste Comte thought to satisfy this need of the heart by suggesting Humanity as the *Grand Être*, but Humanity was and is nothing but an abstraction. Feeling this himself, he recommended the worship of woman, and he prostrated his heart before Clotilde de Vaux; but sacred and beautiful as a man's love of a woman may be, it is no substitute for worship. We must have quite another than ourselves and our own kind, if our hearts are to find their rest. We must have an Almighty, an Infinite; we must have one who is Love. Until his spirit is worshipping, man cannot realize himself, or attain the height of his intended stature.

Again, man must have an assurance of his own immortality. While he believes himself to be mortal, a creature of a day, and that an uncertain day, it is impossible for him to rise much above the level of other ephemeral things. His pursuits must be limited, and his aims must be confined. His affections must be chilled by the shadow of death, and in proportion as he has nobly striven and tenderly loved, his later years must be plunged in hopeless gloom, because his efforts have been ineffectual and his beloved have gone from him. No juggling with terms; no half-poetic raptures about "the choir invisible," can meet the mighty craving of the human heart. Man must be immortal, or he is not man. "He thinks he was not made to die."

But to meet these demands of the spirit what, apart from revelation, can avail? That metaphysics is futile practically all men are agreed. Only the philosopher can follow the dialectics which are to prove the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. And even the philosopher seems to grow pale and wizened in the process of his demonstration, and wins at last a vantage-ground of cold conviction, to find that there is no comfort there. But can science offer the assurance which philosophy was unable to give? Let us listen to the conclusion of a scientific writer on this subject, one who has lost his hold on revelation and can realize a little of what he has lost.

"The highest and most consoling beliefs of the human mind," he says, "are to a great extent bound up with the Christian religion. If we ask ourselves frankly how much, apart from this religion, would remain of faith in a God, and in a future state of existence, the answer must be, very little. Science traces everything back to primeval atoms and germs, and there it leaves us. How came these atoms and energies there, from which this wonderful universe of worlds has been evolved by inevitable laws? What are they in their essence, and what do they mean? The only answer is, It is unknowable. It is "behind the veil," and may be anything. Spirit may be matter, matter may be spirit. We have no faculties by which we can even form a conception, from any discoveries of the telescope or microscope, from any experiments in the laboratory, or from any facts susceptible of real human knowledge, of what may be the first cause underlying all these phenomena.

"In like manner we can already, to a great extent, and probably in a short time shall be able to the fullest extent to trace the whole development of life from the lowest to the highest; from protoplasm, through monera, infusoria,

mollusca, vertebrata, fish, reptile and mammal, up to man; and the individual man from the microscopic egg, through the various stages of its evolution up to birth, childhood, maturity, decline, and death. We can trace also the development of the human race through enormous periods of time, from the modest beginnings up to its present level of civilisation, and show how arts, languages, morals, and religions have been evolved gradually by human laws from primitive elements, many of which are common in their ultimate form to man and the animal creation.

"But here also science stops. Science can give no account of how these germs and nucleated cells, endowed with these marvellous capacities for evolution, came into existence, or got their intrinsic powers. Nor can science enable us to form the remotest conception of what will become of life, consciousness, and conscience, when the material conditions with which they are always associated, while within human experience, have been dissolved by death, and no longer exist. We know as little, in the way of accurate and demonstrable knowledge, of our condition after death as we do of our existence—if we had an existence—before birth."[1]

Science frankly confesses that she can tell us nothing of the things which it most concerns us to know. On those things she is no farther advanced than she was in the days of Aristotle. Never do we feel how much men need a revelation so vividly as when we have grasped the first principles of such a great scientific thinker as Mr. Herbert Spencer, and realize how far he is able to take us and how soon he has to leave us. How does it meet the craving of the soul for God to

[1] "Modern Science and Modern Thought" (pp. 289, 290), by S. Laing. Chapman & Hall; 1890.

show us the slow stages by which man became a living soul? As well might you try to satisfy the musician's ear by telling him how his art had grown from the primitive tom-tom of the savage. How can it help the life to be lived wisely, lovingly, and well, in the midst of the uncertainty of the world, and confronted by the certainty of death, to be told that our physical structure is united by a thousand immediate links with that of other mammals. Such a fact is insignificant; the supreme fact is that we are not like other mammals in the most important respects; we have hearts that long and yearn, minds which enquire and question—*they* have not; we want God, our heart and our flesh crieth out for the living God, and we demand an eternal life—*they* do not.

How can science pretend that what she does not know is not knowledge, while she has to confess that she does not know precisely the things which it most concerns us as men to know? How can the spirit of man be content with the husks which she gives him to eat, when his whole nature craves the kernel? What probability is there that a man will close his eyes to the sun because another person, very clever and industrious, has shut himself up in a dark cellar, and tries to persuade him that his candle is all the light he may legitimately use, and what cannot be seen by his candle is not real?

No, science may not prove revelation, but she proves our need of it. She does her utmost, she widens her borders, she is more earnest, more accurate, more informed, more efficacious than ever; but she shows that what man most wants she cannot give,—she bids him go elsewhere.

But now it may be said: It is one thing to prove that man needs a revelation, and another to show that a revelation has been given. That is perfectly true, and this is not the place to adduce all the evidence which might prove that revelation is a reality; but what an advance we have made on the cold, self-satisfied deism of the eighteenth century, which maintained that the light of nature was enough, and revelation was quite superfluous, when the truest and most candid voices of science are declaring with such growing clearness that for the knowledge which revelation professes to give, revelation, and revelation alone, will suffice!

We Christians believe that we have a revelation, and we find that it suffices. It gives us precisely those assurances about God and about the soul without which we falter, grow bewildered, and begin to despond. We have a vision and a law. Our Bible is the record of the ever-widening, ever-clearing vision of God. The power and authority of the vision seem to be the more convincing, just because we are permitted to see the process of its development. Here we are able to stand with the seer and see, not the long æonian stages of creation which science has been painfully tracking out in these later days, but the supreme fact, which science professes herself unable to see, that God was the Author of it all. Here we are able to see the first imperfect conception of God which came in vision and in thought to the patriarch or sheikh in the earliest dawn of civilisation. Here we can observe the conceptions clearing, through Moses, through the Psalmists, through the Prophets, until at last we have a vision of God in the person of His Son, who is the brightness of the Father's glory,

the express image of His countenance. We see that He, the unseen Creator, is Love.

Our Bible, too, is the record of a law,—a law of human conduct, the will of God as applied to earthly life. At first the law is confined to a few primitive practices and outward observances; then it grows in perplexity and multiplication of details; and only after a long course of discipline, of effort and apparent failure, of teaching and deliberate disobedience, is the law laid bare to its very roots, and presented in the simplified and self-evidencing form of the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic precepts.

It is not necessary to start with any particular theory about the Bible, any more than it is necessary to know the substance of the sun before we can warm ourselves in his beams. It is not necessary to look for scientific accuracy in the histories and treatises through which the vision and the law are communicated to us. We know that the vessels are earthen, and the presupposition all through is that the light was only growing from the glimmer of the dawn up to the perfect day. But we know, we are persuaded, that here, to seeing eyes and humble hearts, is the revelation of God and of His will.

Nor is it only in the Bible that God speaks to us. There have been times in the history of Christendom—such times as the middle of the eighteenth century—when though the Bible was in men's hands, it seemed to be almost a dead letter. "There was no vision, and the people cast off restraint." It is by living men and women to whom He grants visions and reveals truths, that God maintains the purity and power of His revelation to us. He came in vision to Fox and the early

Friends, to Zinzendorf and the early Moravians, to Wesley and the early Methodists. Seldom does a generation pass but some seers are sent to make the Word of God a living influence to their age. The vision is not always unmixed with human error, and when it ceases to be living it may become obstructive, a cause of paralysis rather than of progress. But Augustine and Jerome, Benedict and Leo, Francis and Dominic, Luther and Calvin, Ignatius Loyola and Xavier, Fénélon and Madame Guyon, Jonathan Edwards and Channing, Robertson and Maurice, Erskine and MacLeod Campbell, are but examples of God's method all down the Christian ages. The vision comes pure and fresh as if straight from the presence of God. Traditionalism crumbles away. Doubt retreats like a phantom of the night. Mighty moral revolutions and spiritual awakenings are accomplished by the means of His chosen ones. And it should be our desire and our joy to recognise and welcome these seers of God.

"He that keepeth the law, happy is he." It is a mournful thing to be without a revelation, and to grope in darkness at midday; to hold one's mind in melancholy suspense, uncertain about God, about His will, about the life eternal. But it is better to have no revelation than to have it and disregard it. Honest doubt is full of necessary sorrow, but to believe and not to obey is the road to inevitable ruin.[1] "He that keepeth"

[1] *Cf.* Prov. xxviii. 4, 9:—

"They that forsake the law praise the wicked:
But such as keep the law contend with them.
He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law
Even his prayer is an abomination."

—yes, he that looks into revelation, not for curiosity, but for a law by which to live; who listens to the wise precepts, not in order to exclaim, "How wise they are!" but in order to act on them.

There are many professing Christians who are constantly plunged in gloom. Unbelievers may point the finger at them, and say, "They believe in God, in salvation, and in heaven, but see what an effect it has on them. Do they really believe?" Oh, yes, they really believe, but they do not obey; and no amount of faith brings any lasting happiness apart from obedience. The law requires us to love God, to love men; it requires us to abstain from all appearance of evil, to touch not the unclean thing; it bids us love not the world, it tells us how impossible the double service of God and mammon is. Now though we believe it all it can give us nothing but pain unless we live up to it. If there is a vision and we shut our eyes to it, if there is a law and we turn away from it, woe unto us! But if we receive the vision, if we loyally and earnestly keep the law, the world cannot fathom the depth of our peace, nor rise to the height of our joy.

XXX.

THE WORDS OF AGUR.

The rendering of the first verse of this chapter is very uncertain. Without attempting to discuss the many conjectural emendations, we must briefly indicate the view which is here taken. A slight alteration in the pointing (לְאִיתִי אֵל instead of the Masoretic reading לְאִיתִיאֵל) changes the proper name Ithiel into a significant verb; and another slight change (וְאֻכָּל for וְאֻכָל) gives us another verb in the place of Ucal. To remove the difficulty of the word "oracle," a difficulty which arises from the fact that the chapter which follows is not a prophetic utterance of the kind to which that word might be applied, it is necessary, with Grätz, to make a more serious change, and to read הַמּוֹשֵׁל for הַמַּשָּׂא. And to explain the word הַגֶּבֶר, which occurs in a similar connection in Numb. xxiv. 3, 15, and 2 Sam. xxiii. 1, we must suppose that some relative clause defining the nature of "the man" has been dropped. The great uncertainty of the text is witnessed by the LXX., who place this passage after xxiv. 23, and give a rendering which has very little resemblance to our present Hebrew text. It is highly probable, both from the subject matter and from the numerical arrangements, which are thoroughly Rabbinical, that this chapter and chap. xxxi. are of late origin, and represent the last phase of the proverbial literature of Israel in the days after the return from the Exile. If this be so, the obscurity and uncertainty are characteristic of an artificial period of literature, and of a decay in literary taste. Adopting, then, the alterations which have been mentioned, we obtain the following result:—

"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the proverb-writer:

The utterance of the man [who has questioned and thought]: I have wearied after God, I have wearied after God, and am faint, for I am too stupid for a man, and am without reason, and I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the All Holy," etc.

THIS chapter is full of curious interest. It is a collection of sayings which are apparently connected only by the circumstance that they were attributed to

one person, Agur, the son of Jakeh. Whoever Agur was, he had a certain marked individuality; he combined meditation on lofty questions of theology with a sound theory of practical life. He was able to give valuable admonitions about conduct. But his characteristic delight was to group together in quatrains visible illustrations of selected qualities or ideas.

It may be well for us to glance at these picturesque groups, and then to return to the more philosophical and religious sentiments with which the chapter opens.

"Slander not a servant to his master," says Agur, "lest the servant curse thee, and thou be held guilty." Even underlings have their rights; the Lord makes their cause His own, and a curse from them falls with as much weight on a slanderer as the words of more influential people. It is one of the surest tests of a man's character to see how he treats servants; if he is uniformly courteous, considerate, just, and generous in his treatment of them, we may safely infer that he is a noble character; if he is haughty, domineering, revengeful, and malicious to them, we need not attach much importance to his pleasing manners and plausible services to those whom he considers his equals.

Now follow two of these singular quatrains. There are four kinds of men pointed out, and held up, not to our abhorrence, that is unnecessary, but simply to our observation: the unfilial, the self-righteous, the haughty, and the rapacious who devour the poor and the needy. It is not necessary to say anything about these persons. Their doom is stamped on their brows; to name them is to condemn them; to describe them is to write out their sentence.

Again, there are four things which like the blood-sucking horse-leech are always insatiable. The vampire has her daughters in the earth; it is, as Professor Cheyne says, "a quasi-mythical expression." These daughters are two, nay, they are three, nay, they are four; and they are, as it were, the representatives of all creation:[1] Sheol, the invisible world, which draws into itself the countless generations of the dead; the generative principle, which never wearies of producing new generations of the living; the earth, which is for ever absorbing the cadent waters of heaven; and the fire, which will consume all the fuel that is given to it.

Now follows a further comment upon unfilial conduct: the eye is regarded as the instrument by which a son shows his feelings to his parents; he has not perhaps gone the length of uttering a curse against them, still less of raising his hand to ill-treat them, but his eye flashes derision upon his father, and by its haughty obstinacy declares that it will not obey his mother. The offending member shall be picked out by the clamorous ravens, and eaten by the young of the soaring eagle.

Next we have four more quatrains. First, there are the four wonders which baffle Agur's understanding; wonders which are comprehensible only to God, as the Vedic hymn says,—

> "The path of ships across the sea,
> The soaring eagle's flight he knows."

[1] *Cf.* the Sanscrit Hitopadesa, "Fire is never satisfied with fuel, nor the ocean with rivers, nor death with all creatures, nor bright-eyed women with men;" also the Arabic proverb, "Three things are of three never full, women's womb of man, wood of fire, and earth rain."

The wonder seems to be in the reality and power of impalpable things. How little of all that passes in the universe is open to observation, or leaves a track behind. The eagle mounts through the air as if he marched on a solid beaten road; the serpent, without limbs, glides over the smooth rock where feet would slip, and leaves no trace behind; the ship ploughs the deep, and over trackless waters follows her track which is invisible; a man and a maid meet, swift glances pass, hearts blend, and that is done which can never be undone; or on the evil side, the bad woman follows her illicit and hidden courses, while to all appearance she is a faithful wife and mother.

Secondly, there are four human conditions which are intolerable to society, viz., an essentially servile spirit put into the place of authority; a fool who, instead of being corrected, is confirmed in his folly by prosperity; a marriage where the wife is hated; and a slave girl in the position which Hagar occupied with relation to Sarah her mistress.

Thirdly, there are four kinds of animals which illustrate that size is not necessarily greatness, and that it is possible to be insignificant and yet wise. The tiny ants are a model of intelligent mutual co-operation and prudent thrift. The little jerboas seem helpless enough, but they are sensible in the choice of their homes, for they dwell securely in rocky fastnesses. The locusts seem as weak and inoffensive as insects can be, yet they form a mighty army, ordered in battle array; "they run like mighty men; they climb the wall like men of war; and they march every one in his ways, and they break not their ranks."[1] The

[1] Joel ii. 7.

lizard seems but a plebeian creature; you can seize it with your hands; it is defenceless and devoid of natural capabilities; and yet with its swift crawlings and tireless dartings it will find its way into kings' palaces, where greater and stronger creatures cannot enter.

Lastly, there are four things which impress one with their stateliness of motion; the lion, the creature that is girt in the loins, whether a war-horse or a greyhound, the he-goat, and—surely with a little touch of satire—the king when his army is with him.

Then the collection of Agur's sayings ends with a wise and picturesque word of counsel to exercise a strong restraint over our rising passions.

But now we may turn back to the passage with which the chapter opens. Here is the cry of one who has sought to find out God. It is an old and a mournful cry. Many have emitted it from the beginning; many utter it now. But few have spoken with more pathetic humility, few have made us feel with so much force the solemnity and the difficulty of the question as this unknown Agur. We see a brow wrinkled with thought, eyes dimmed with long and close observation; it is not the boor or the sot that makes this humiliating confession; it is the earnest thinker, the eager enquirer. He has meditated on the wonderful facts of the physical world; he has watched the great trees sway under the touch of the invisible wind, and the waves rise up in their might, lashing the shores, but vainly essaying to pass their appointed boundaries; he has considered the vast expanse of the earth, and enquired, on what foundations does it rest, and where are its limits? He cannot question the "eternal power and divinity" which can alone account for this ordered universe.

He has not, like many thinkers ancient and modern, "dropped a plummet down the broad deep universe, and cried, No God." He knows that there is a God; there must be an Intelligence able to conceive, coupled with a power able to realize, this mighty mechanism. But who is it? What is His name or His Son's name? Here are the footsteps of the Creator, but where is the Creator Himself? Here are the signs of His working on every hand. There is an invisible power that ascends and descends on the earth by staircases unseen. Who is He? These careering winds, before which we are powerless, obey some control; sometimes they are "upgathered like sleeping flowers;" who is it that holds them then? These great waters sway to and fro, or they pour in ceaseless currents from their fountains, or they gather in the quiet hollows of the hills; but who is it that appoints the ocean, and the river, and the lake? Who feeds them all, and restrains them all? Whose is the garment which holds them as a woman carries a pitcher lashed to her back in the fold of her dress? The earth is no phantom, no mirage, it is solid and established; but who gave to matter its reality, and in the ceaseless flux of the atoms fixed the abiding forms, and ordered the appropriate relations? Ah! what is His name? Has He a son? Is man, for instance, His son? Or does the idea of the Eternal and Invisible God imply also an Eternal Son, a Being one with Him, yet separable, the object of His love, the instrument of His working, the beginning of His creation? Who is He? That He is holy seems an inevitable conclusion from the fact that we know what holiness is, and recognise its sovereignty. For how, in thinking of the mighty

Being who made all things, dare I give Him a lower attribute than that which I can give to my fellow-men? How dare I withhold from Him that which I know of the Highest and the Best? But though I know that He is holy, the All Holy One I do not know. My weak and sinful nature has glimpses of Him, but no steady visions. I lose Him in the confused welter of things. I catch the gleam of His face in the hues of the rainbow and in the glow of the eternal hills; but I lose it when I strive to follow among the angry gatherings of the stormclouds, in the threatening crash of the thunder, the roar of the avalanche, and the rent ruins of the earthquake.

And the man, considering all things, questioning, seeking, exclaims, "I am weary and faint." The splendours of God haunt his imagination, the sanctities of God fill his conscience with awe, the thoughts of God lie as presuppositions behind all his thinking. But he has not understanding; baffled and foiled and helpless, he says that he is too brutish to be a man. Surely a *man* would know God; surely he must be but one of the soulless creatures, dust of the dust, for he has not the knowledge of the Holy One.

To this impetuous hail of questions an answer comes. For indeed in the fact that the questions are put already the answer lies. In the humble cry that he is too stupid to be a man is already the clearest proof that he is raised incalculably above the brute.

But who is it that offers the answer in vv. 5-9? It would seem as if Agur himself has suggested the question—a question borrowed probably from some noble heathen thinker; and now he proceeds to meet the wild and despairing outcry with the results of his own

reflection. He does not attempt the answer on the lines of natural religion. His answer in effect is this: You cannot know God, you cannot by searching find Him unless He reveals Himself; His revelation must come as an articulate and intelligible word. As the Psalm says—for it seems to be a quotation from Psalm xviii. 30—"Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that trust in Him." Agur appeals to a written revelation, a revelation which is complete and rounded, and to which no further addition may be made (ver. 6). It was probably the time when Ezra the scribe had gathered together the Law and the Psalms and the Prophets, and had formed the first scriptural canon. Since then a great deal has been added to the canon, these words of Agur among the rest, but the assertion remains essentially true. Our knowledge of God depends on His self-revelation, and the method of that revelation is to speak, through the lips of God-possessed men, words which are tried by experience and proved by the living faith of those who trust in God. "I am that I am" has spoken to men, and to Him, the Eternally-existent, have they ascribed the visible universe. "The God of Israel" has spoken to men, and they have learnt therefore to trace His hand in history and in the development of human affairs. The Holy One has in prophets and poets spoken to men, and they have become aware that all goodness comes from Him, and all evil is hateful to Him. And lastly, His Son has spoken to men, and has declared Him in a way that never could have been dreamed, has shown them the Father, has revealed that new unutterable Name.

The answer to the great cry of the human heart, the wearied, fainting human heart, is given only in revela-

tion, in the tried word of God, and completely only in the Word of God that was made flesh. The proof of that revelation is furnished to all those who trust in the God so revealed, for He becomes a shield to them; they abide under the shadow of His realized presence. It is not possible to add unto the words of God; our speculations lead us farther, but they only lead us into error; and by them we incur His reproof, and our fictions become disastrously exposed. The answer to philosophy is in revelation, and they who do not accept the revealed answer are left asking eternally the same weary and hopeless question, "What is his name, and what is his son's name?"

And now, with a quaint and practical homeliness which is very suggestive, Agur notices two conditions, which he has evidently observed to be necessary if we are to find the answer which revelation gives to the enquiry of the human heart after God. First of all we must be rid of vanity and lies. How true this is! We may hold the Bible in our hands, but while our hearts are void of seriousness and sincerity we can find nothing in it, certainly no word of God. A vain person and an untruthful person can receive no genuine revelation; they may believe, or think that they believe, the current religious dogmas, and they may be able to give a verbal answer to the question which we have been considering, but they cannot have the knowledge of the Holy One. More than half the godlessness of men is due simply to want of earnestness; they are triflers on the earth, they are painted bubbles, which burst if any solid thing touches them; they are drifting vapours and exhalations, which pass away and leave not a wrack behind. But there are

many men who are serious enough in their search for knowledge, and yet are vitiated through and through by a radical want of truthfulness. They are prepared for facts, but only facts of a certain sort. They want to know God, but only on condition that He shall not be supernatural. They want to study the truths of the spiritual world, but only on condition that the spiritual shall be material. O remove far from me vanities and lies!

Then there is a second condition desirable for the due appreciation of religious truth, a social and economical condition. Agur might have known our modern world with its terrible extremes of wealth and poverty. He perceived how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven; and, on the other hand, how probable it is that hungry men will be seduced into stealing and betrayed into blasphemy. That there is much truth in this view we may easily satisfy ourselves by considering the wealthy classes in England, whose question, urged through all their pomp and ceremonial of heartless worship, is practically, "Who is the Lord?" and by then looking at the eight hundred thousand paupers of England, amongst whom religion is practically unknown except as a device for securing food.

And when we have duly weighed this saying of Agur's, we may come to see that among all the pressing religious and spiritual problems of our day, this also must be entertained and solved, How to secure a more equable distribution of wealth, so that the extremes of wealth and poverty should disappear, and all should be fed with the food that is needful for them.

XXXI.

A GOOD WOMAN.

"O woman-hearts, that keep the days of old
In living memory, can *you* stand back
When Christ calls? Shall the heavenly Master lack
The serving love, which is your life's fine gold?

"Do you forget the hand which placed the crown
Of happy freedom on the woman's head,
And took her from the dying and the dead,
Lifting the wounded soul long trodden down?

"Do you forget who bade the morning break,
And snapped the fetters of the iron years?
The Saviour calls for service: from your fears
Rise girt with faith, and work for His dear sake!

"And He will touch the trembling lips with fire,—
O let us hasten, lest we come too late!
And all shall work; if some must 'stand and wait,'
Be theirs that wrestling prayer that will not tire."

R. O.

THE last chapter of the book of Proverbs consists of two distinct compositions, and the only connection between them is to be found in their date. The words of King Lemuel, "a saying which his mother taught him,"[1] and the description of a good woman,[2] must both be referred to a very late epoch of Hebrew literature. The former contains several Aramaic words[3]

[1] Prov. xxxi. 1-9. [2] Prov. xxxi. 10-31.

[3] *E.g.*, בַּר ver. 2 and מְלָכִין ver. 3: *cf.* the strange expressions כָּל־בְּנֵי־עַנְיִי and כָּל־בְּנֵי חֲלוֹף in vv. 5, 8.

and expressions which connect it with the period of the exile; and the latter is an alphabetical acrostic, *i.e.*, the verses begin with the successive letters of the alphabet; and this artificial mode of composition, which appears also in some of the Psalms, is sufficient of itself to indicate the last period of the literature, when the Rabbinical methods were coming into use.

About the words of Lemuel, of whom it may be observed we know nothing at all, enough has been said in previous lectures. We need here only notice that the mother's influence in the education of her son, even though that son is to be a king, comes very suitably as the introduction to the beautiful description of the good woman with which the chapter closes. It is said that the mother of George III. brought him up with the constantly-repeated admonition, "George, be a king," and that to this early training was due that exalted notion of the prerogative and that obstinate assertion of his will which occasioned the calamities of his reign. Kings have usually been more ready to imbibe such lessons than moral teaching from their mothers; but whatever may be the actual result, we all feel that a woman is never more nobly occupied than in warning her son against the seductions of pleasure, and in giving to him a high sense of duty. It is from a mother's lips we should all learn to espouse the cause of the helpless and the miserable, and to bear an open heart for the poor and needy.[1]

But now before coming to examine in detail the poem of the virtuous woman, let us briefly recall what the book hitherto has taught us on the subject of womanhood. It began with solemn and oft-repeated

[1] Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

warnings against the "strange woman," and echoes of that mournful theme have accompanied us throughout: the strange woman is a deep ditch, a narrow pit; he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.[1] And even where the woman's nature is not corrupted by impurity we are several times reminded how she may destroy the peace of man's life by certain faults of temper. If she is contentious and fretful she can make the house utterly unbearable; it will be better to live in a corner of the housetop or in a desert land, exposed to the continual downpour of the autumn rains, than to be assailed by her tongue.[2] The attempt to restrain her is like trying to grasp the wind, or to seize an object which is smeared with oil.[3] We are reminded too how incongruously sometimes great beauty of person is combined with inward faults. "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion."[4]

But we must distinctly understand that these severe strictures on woman corrupted and woman imperfect are only so many witnesses to her value and importance. The place she fills in life is so supreme that if she fails in her duty human life as a whole is a failure. In her hands lie the issues of life for mankind. "The wisdom of woman builds her house, and the folly of woman plucks it down with her hands."[5] What the homes of a nation are, the nation is; and it is woman's high and beautiful function to make the homes, and within her power lies the terrible capacity for marring them. She, much more than the king, is the fountain

[1] Prov. xxii. 14, xxiii. 27.
[2] Prov. xix. 13, xxi. 9, xxv. 24, xxi. 19, xxvii. 15.
[3] Prov. xxvii. 16.
[4] Prov. xi. 22.
[5] Prov. xiv. 1.

of honour.[1] The honour she gives and the honour she commands will decide the whole tone of society. Pure, true, and strong, she makes men worship purity, truth, and strength. Corrupt, false, and vain, she blights and blasts the ideal of man, lowers all his aspirations, excites his evil passions to a frenzy of iniquity, degrades his soul to a level below the brutes.

The condition of woman is the touchstone of a civilised society.

Again, there is a sense in which woman is an interpreter and revealer of God to the human race. She has religious intuitions and spiritual susceptibilities in which the other sex is usually deficient. Most religious systems in the world's history have overlooked her, and have suffered accordingly. The religion of Jesus Christ recognised her, claimed for her her rightful place, and to this day does much of its best work in the world through her gracious ministrations, through her unquestioning faith, through her unquenchable love. It is as a foreshadowing of this religious significance which Christ was to give to womanhood that the Proverbs recognise the beautiful direct relation between God and the possession of a good wife. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord."[2] Wealth, as it is ordinarily understood, is of the earth,—it can be derived from ancestors by inheritance, or it can be earned by toil of hand and brain,—but every wife worthy of the name is far above all wealth: she cannot be earned or inherited; she comes, as the mother of mankind came, direct from the hand of the

[1] Prov. xi. 16. [2] Prov. xviii. 22.

Lord.[1] The marriage tie is a thought of God's heart. He Himself has arranged the exquisite blending of life with life and spirit with spirit; He has fitted man to woman and woman to man, so that the perfect man is not the man alone, the perfect woman is not the woman alone, but the man and woman one flesh, mystically united, the completeness each of the other; not two, but a single whole.

We may now examine in detail this connected description of the virtuous woman, whose value is not to be measured by material wealth, and who yet, from a merely material point of view, is a source of wealth to those who are fortunate enough to call her theirs.

She is a wife. The modern conception of a woman as an independent person, standing alone, engaged in her own business or profession, and complete in her isolated life, is not to be looked for in the book of Proverbs. It is the creation of accidental circumstances. However necessary it may be in a country where the women are largely in excess of the men, it cannot be regarded as final or satisfactory. In the beginning it was not so, neither will it be so in the end. If men and women are to abide in strength and to develope the many sides of their nature, they must be united. It is not good for man to be alone; nor is it good for woman to be alone. There are some passages

[1] Prov. xix. 14. In the LXX. this clause is beautifully rendered παρὰ δὲ κυρίου ἁρμόζεται γυνὴ ἀνδρί. By the Lord's ordinance woman and man are dovetailed together in a complete harmony. The thought is well expanded in Ecclesiasticus (xxvi. 1-3): "Blessed is the man that has a virtuous wife, for thereby his life is doubled. A woman made for a man rejoices her husband, and he shall fulfil the years of his life in peace. A virtuous wife is a good portion, in the portion of them that fear the Lord shall she be given."

in the New Testament which seem to invalidate this truth. The advocates of celibacy appeal to the example of Christ and to the express words of St. Paul. But the New Testament, as our Lord Himself expressly declares, does not abrogate the eternal law which was from the beginning. And if He Himself abstained from marriage, and if St. Paul seems to approve of such an abstention, we must seek for the explanation in certain exceptional and temporary circumstances; for it is precisely to Christ Himself in the first instance, and to His great Apostle in the second, that we owe our loftiest and grandest conceptions of marriage. There was no room for a personal marriage in the life of Him who was to be the Bridegroom of His Church; and St. Paul distinctly implies that the pressing troubles and anxieties of his own life, and the constant wearing labours which were required of the Gentile Apostle, formed the reason why it was better for him, and for such as he, to remain single.

At any rate the virtuous woman of the Proverbs is a wife: and the first thing to observe is the part she plays in relation to her husband. She is his stay and confidence: "The heart of her husband trusteth in her." She is his natural confidante and counsellor; her advice is more valuable than that of much cleverer people, because it is so absolutely disinterested; the hearts are in such vital contact that the merely intellectual communications have a quality all their own. One may often observe in an ideal marriage, though the husband seems to be the stronger and the more self-reliant, the wife is really the pillar of strength; if death removes her, he is forlorn and bereft and helpless; the gradual work of the years has led him to depend on

her more and more, to draw from her his best inspirations, and to turn instinctively to her for advice and direction.

"She doeth him good, and not evil, all the days of her life."[1] It is not only when she comes as a young bride into his house, bright with youth, encircled with the glamour of early love,—then, it is true, the thought of her nerves his endeavours and quickens his eager steps as he turns homeward in the evening,—it is not only while her fresh charms last, and her womanly beauty acts as a spell on him, while the desire to retain her love disciplines and strengthens whatever is good in his character; but right through to the end of her life, when she has grown old, when the golden hair is grey, and the blooming cheeks are wrinkled, and the upright form is bent,—when other people see nothing beautiful about her except the beauty of old age and decay, he sees in her the sweet bride of earlier years, to him the eyes appear unchanged and the voice thrills him with happy memories; she ministers to him still and does him good; not now with the swift alacrity of foot and the deft movement of the hand, but with the dear, loyal heart, with the love which the years have mellowed and the trust which the changing circumstances of life have tested and confirmed.

It is this strong, sweet core of life in the home which gives the man dignity and honour in public. She is a crown to her husband.[2] His influence in the life of his town or of his country is not always directly traced to its true source. But it is that woman's noble sway over him, it is the constant spur and chastening of her

[1] Prov. xxxi. 12. [2] Prov. xii. 4.

love, which gives him the weighty voice and the grave authority in the counsels of the nation. "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land."[1] He can make but a poor return to her for all her quiet unobtrusive and self-sacrificing help year after year and on to the end, but he can at least repay her with growing reverence and loyalty; he can tell her, as it were with the impassioned lips of a lover, what he owes to her; when her children rise up and call her blessed, he can praise her, saying, "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all."[2] Indeed it will be his growing conviction that of all the daughters of woman there is none equal to his wife. Her charms have grown upon him, her character has ripened before his eyes, her love has become at once stronger and more precious every year. It is no flattery, no idle compliment of courting-days, no soft word to win the coy heart of the maiden, but it is his own deep and sincere feeling; it is said to her who is his and has been his for years, and in whose assured possession he finds his greatest peace: "I do not question that other women are good and true, but I am sure that you are better than all." And so she is. Every true wife is the best wife.

The next point in the virtuous woman to which our attention is drawn is her unflagging industry. Her husband "shall have no lack of gain."[3] In addition to all those treasures of mutual love and spiritual converse, all those invaluable services of counsel and guidance, of criticism and encouragement, she is a positive source

[1] Prov. xxxi. 23. [2] Prov. xxxi. 29. [3] Prov. xxxi. 11.

of wealth to him. She is the house-manager. If he earns the bread in the first instance, it is in her hands that it seems to be miraculously multiplied. If he brings home the money which is enough for their wants, it is she who turns the silver into gold and makes the modest means appear great wealth. The fact is her hands are always busy. The spindle, the distaff, the loom, are within her reach and are constantly plied. While she unravels the knotted cares of her husband in the evening with her bright and cheery talk, while she encourages him in all his plans and heartens him for all his duties, her busy fingers are making clothes for the children, repairing, adapting, improving, or else are skilfully constructing ornaments and decorations for the household, turning the poor room into a palace, making the walls beam with beauty and the hearts of all within laugh for joy.

There is something quite magical and impressive in woman's economy: "She is like the merchant ships; she bringeth her food from afar."[1] No one knows how it is done. The table is well spread, the food is daintily served, on infinitesimal means. She finds out by the quick intuitions of love how to get the things which the loved ones like, and by many a little sacrifice unperceived she produces effects which startle them all. She has a secret of doing and getting which no one knows but she. Early passers-by have seen a light in the house long before the day dawns; she has been up preparing the breakfast for the household, and mapping out the work for all, so that no hours may be wasted and no one in the family may be idle.[2] Her

[1] Prov. xxxi. 14. [2] Prov. xxxi. 15.

boundless economies produce astonishing results. One morning she has to announce to the husband and the children that she has managed to put together a little sum which will purchase the freehold of their house and garden.[1] Her husband exclaims, Why, how has it been done? Where has the money come from out of our little income? She smiles significantly and will not tell; but the tears moisten his eyes as he looks into her face and reads the story of self-denials, and managings, and toils, which have issued in this surprise. And the children look up with a sense of awe and wonder. They feel that there is something of the supernatural about mother; and perhaps they are right.

She has all the delicacy and even weakness of a woman, but the life of constant activity and cheerful toil preserves her health and increases her strength. Idle women, who lounge their days away in constant murmurings over their ailments, speak contemptuously about her,—"She has the strength of a horse," they say, "and can bear anything." They do not know, they do not wish to know, that she is the author of her own strength. It is her own indomitable will, her own loving heart, which girds her loins with strength and makes strong her arms.[2] There are others who carp at her on different grounds; they do not understand how one with her husband's income can keep so comfortable a household or dress her children as she does. Those cushions of tapestry, that clothing of fine linen and purple, are an offence to her critics. "How she does it I am sure I don't know," says one, implying

[1] Prov. xxxi. 16. [2] Prov. xxxi. 17.

that there is something quite uncanny and disreputable about it. "She works like a slave," says another, with the tone of scorn that one would employ for a slave. But that is the truth: "She perceiveth that her merchandise is profitable: her lamp goeth not out by night."[1] She is indeed indefatigable. She actually makes garments which she can sell, girdles for the merchants,[2] in addition to looking well to the ways of her household. Certainly she does not eat the bread of idleness.[3]

She can, however, very easily bear the contemptuous criticisms of others. The practical results of her life are sufficiently satisfying to make her a little independent. She has secured herself and her household against the contingencies which harass other housewives. The approach of winter has no alarms for her: all the children and servants are warmly and sufficiently clad.[4] The uncertain future has no terrors for her: she has made ample provision for it, and can regard the unknown chances with a smile of confidence.[5] And indeed, whatever detractors may say behind her back, it is not easy for any one to say anything severe in her presence. For the same loving, earnest, diligent ways which have made her household comfortable and secure have clothed her with garments better than scarlet and linen. "Strength and dignity are her clothing,"—robes so gracious and beautiful that criticism is silenced in her presence, while the hearts of all good and honest people are drawn out to her.

[1] Prov. xxxi. 18.
[2] Prov xxxi. 24.
[3] Prov xxxi. 27
[4] Prov. xxxi. 21.
[5] Prov. xxxi. 25.

But here is another characteristic of the virtuous woman. Economy and generosity go hand in hand. Frugal livers and hard workers are always the largest givers. This woman, whose toil late at night and early in the morning has enriched and blessed her own, is ready to help those who are less fortunate. "She spreadeth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."[1] Most women are naturally pitiful and shrink from the sight of suffering; but while idle and self-indulgent women try to avoid the painful sight, and turn their flow of pity into the channels of vapid sentimentality, the good woman trains her sense of pity by coming into contact with those who deserve it, and only seeks to avoid the sight of suffering by trying everywhere and always to relieve it.

Among all the noble and Christlike offices of woman this is the one which most strikingly connects her with the human life of our Lord. It is her function to excite and to cherish the quality of compassion in the human heart, and by her trained skill and intuitive tact to make the ministrations of the community to the poor truly charitable instead of dangerously demoralizing. Man is apt to relieve the poor by the laws of political economy, without emotion and by measure: he makes a Poor Law which produces the evil it pretends to relieve; he degrades the lovely word Charity into a badge of shame and a wanton insult to humanity. It is woman that "spreads out her palm and reacheth forth her hand" to the poor, bringing her heart into the work, giving, not doles of money, but

[1] Prov. xxxi. 20.

the helpfulness of a sister's love, the tenderness of a mother's solicitude, the awakening touch of a daughter's care. And the hand which is thus held out to the poor is precisely the hand which has been laid on the distaff and the spindle; not the lazy hand or the useless hand, but the hand which is supple with toil, dexterous with acquired skill.

There are two reflections which must have occurred to us in following this description of the good woman. Her portrait has risen before our eyes, and we ask, Is she beautiful? We have watched her activities, their mode and their result, and we wonder whether she is religious. "Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised."[1] That this woman has a beauty of her own seems clear, and that she fears the Lord is a fair inference to make. It is idle to declaim against the charms of personal beauty; we may call it deceitful and vain, but it will not cease to be attractive. Men will not be reasoned or ridiculed out of that instinctive homage which they pay to a lovely face; the witchery of bright eyes and arch looks, the winsomeness of sweet contours and delicate hues, will last, we may surmise, as long as the sun and moon endure; and why should we dishonour God by supposing that He did not make the beauty which attracts and the attraction which the beauty excites? But it is not impossible to open men's eyes to the beauty of a less transient and more satisfying kind which lies in the character and conduct of women. If mothers accustom their sons to see those sterling attractions which permanently secure the affection and

[1] Prov. xxxi. 30.

the devotion of a husband, the young men will not be content with superficial beauties and vanishing charms in the women whom they choose.

And is not the beauty of woman—such beauty as we have been contemplating—the result of fearing the Lord? Is it possible, apart from a living faith in a living God, to maintain that lovely wifeliness, that self-sacrificing, diligent love, that overflow of pity to the poor and needy, which constitute grace and loveliness of character? Has any one succeeded in even depicting an imaginary woman devoid of religion and yet complete and beautiful? We have already noticed how suited the woman's nature is to receive religious impressions and to communicate religious influences; we may now notice, in concluding, that this very characteristic renders a woman without God even more imperfect and unsatisfying than a man without God. She is naturally inclined to cling to a person rather than to an idea, to follow a person rather than a theory. The only Person to whom she can cling with absolutely good and hallowing results is God; the only Person whom she can follow and minister to without detriment to her womanhood and with gain to her spirit is Christ. A godless woman makes a sore shipwreck of life, whether she becomes sensual and depraved, or ambitious and domineering, or bitter and cynical, or vain and conventional. In her ruin there is always a power as of a fallen angel, and she can drag others with her in her fall.

If a man is wise then in choosing for himself a wife, the first thing he will demand is that she shall be one that fears the Lord, one who shall be able to lead him and help him in that which is his truest life, and to

maintain for him a saving intercourse with the world of spiritual realities. He may be assured that in her love to God he has the best guarantee of her love to him, and that if she does not fear and love God the main sanction for their wedded happiness will be wanting.

Finally, where the woman who has been described is actually found in real life it is for us to recognise her and to reward her. Let society take note of her: "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates." The great Greek historian said that woman's highest praise consisted in not being mentioned at all. That is not the teaching of Revelation. Woman's best work is often done in silence and without observation, but her highest praise is when the seeds sown in silence have grown into flowers of loveliness and fruit that is sweet to the taste, and the whole community is forced to yield her the honour which is her due, exalting, with heartfelt admiration and with deep gratitude to God, the Wife, the Mother, the Ministrant to the Poor.

INDEX OF TEXTS IN PROVERBS QUOTED OR EXPOUNDED.

VERSES	PAGES
CHAPTER I.	
i.-ix.	7
7	9, 15, etc.
11-14	26, 27
13	32
17	34
19	30, 33
24-31	35, 36
25	34
31	34, 37
32	25, 34
CHAPTER II.	
10	25
12	24
16	24
19	34
21	37
22	33, 37
CHAPTER III.	
1-10	37
6	46
8	39
12	50
13-15	48
16	50
18	49
27	43
28	43
29	41
31	50
33	41
35	51
CHAPTER IV.	
1-7	52
8, 9	55
12	64
14	56
16, 17	26, 63
18	63
19	62
20-23	57
24	59
25-27	61
CHAPTER V.	
3-20	27
8	66
9	72
10	72
11	72
12-14	28, 72
15-19	69
21	62, 72
22	29
23	73
CHAPTER VI.	
1-5	80
6-8	83
12-15	84
16-19	88
20-23	91
24-35	27
25	68
26	72, 75
27, 28	71
32	29
33	72
34	72
35	72
CHAPTER VII.	
1-5	93
4	94
5-27	27, 95, etc.
8	95
9	94
14	124
15	68
16, 17	68
22	99
CHAPTER VIII.	
1-6	107
7-9	108
10-16	109
15-16	4
17	110
18	109
20	108
22	110
22-31	112, etc.
26	110
29	111
30-36	120
CHAPTER IX.	
1-3	123-4
4	122
5	124
6	125

VERSES	PAGES
7	125
8	348
9	127
10	9, 127
12	37, 131
17	68

CHAPTER X.

1	306
2	135, 141
4	139
12	209
13	342
14	164
15	138, 290
17	181
18	339
19	171
22	142
23	111, 156, 338
28	150
29	155
30	150

CHAPTER XI.

1	215
2	183
3	151
4	142
5	150
6	149, 150
7	151
8	152
9	169, 176
10	154
11	154
12	177
13	169
14	256
15	80, 332
16	399
17	297
18	150
19	151
20	155
21	151
22	398
24	146, 298
25	146
26	294
27	152
28	140
30	152
31	154

CHAPTER XII.

1	163, 181
2	155
4	4, 402
5	177, 198
6	163, 169, 176
7	150, 151
8	42
9	139
11	152, 267, 275
13	152, 163, 164
14	163
15	183, 256
16	163, 166
17	91, 163, 167
18	163, 164, 167, 172
19	89, 163, 168
21	152
22	163, 168
23	163, 339
24	272
25	163, 173
26	153, 154
27	265, 273

CHAPTER XIII.

1	125, 179, 181
2	164
3	150, 171
4	271
5	108
6	152
8	138
9	151
10	179, 183, 184
11	141
12	193, 194
13	179, 181, 184, 259
16	171
17	182
18	140, 179
19	192
22	141, 153
24	309
25	152

CHAPTER XIV.

1	398
3	165, 176, 186
4	269
5	91, 176
6	126
7	171, 339
9	156
10	191, *et seq.*
11	150
12	65, 151
13	191, 195
14	152
15	177
16	186
17	205
19	153
20	138, 139
21	294
22	152
23	171
24	141, 340
25	91, 176
26	152
27	15
28	332
29	205
30	210
31	143, 291
32	153
33	171, 339
34	4, 154
35	328

CHAPTER XV.

1	172, 203
2	171
3	197
4	172, 203, 210
6	141, 142, 216
7	175
8	156, 181
9	155

VERSES	PAGES
11	198
12	126
13	195
15	195, 357
16, 17	143
18	203
19	264
20	181, 306
22	256, 332
23	165, 173
25	187, 291
26	155, 172
27	145
28	151, 169, 176
29	156
30	196
31	184
32	181
33, etc.	4, 184, 215

CHAPTER XVI.

1	178
1-7	4, 216
2	198
4	201
5	151, 187
6	226, 362
7	324
8	142
9	216
11	215
12	327
13	153, 327
14	328
15	328
16	142
17	152
18	180
19	180
20	4, 179, 183, 188, 216
21	175
22	340
23	175
24	173
25	151
26	265
27	154
28	169
29	27
30	85
32	209
33	4, 217

CHAPTER XVII.

1	143
2	184
3	198
4	177
5	143, 291, 314, 316
6	143
7	332
8	138
9	169
10	182
11	259
12	204, 343
14	205, 208
15	155
16	339
17	227
18	80
19	185
20	165
21	306, 339
22	194, 195
24	61
25	306
26	153, 155
27	177, 205
28	177

CHAPTER XVIII.

1	205, 239, etc.
2	171
3	154
4	105
5	155
6	165
7	165
8	169
9	167, 266
11	138
12	180, 189
13	170
14	194
15	127
16	138
18	217
19	234
20	164
21	164
22	4, 399
23	139
24	229, 233

CHAPTER XIX.

1	142, 165
2	256
4	138, 139
5	91, 167
6	138
7	3, 139, 166
8	258
9	91
10	342
11	205
12	328
13	292, 306, 398
14	4
15	265
16	152, 258
17	146, 291
18	309
19	206
20	256, 261
21	216, 257
22	165, 198
23	258, 362
24	263
25	126
26	306
27	258
28	167
29	258, 342

CHAPTER XX.

1	279
2	329
3	205
4	262
5	256
7	153
8	327
9	198
10	215

VERSES	PAGES
11	153
12	197
13	204
14	86
15	142, 176
16	80
17	168
18	256, 332
19	169
21	145
22	210
23	215
24	198
26	327
27	198
28	328
30	310

CHAPTER XXI.

1	4, 328
2	151, 198
3	156
4	188
5	272
6	141
7	150
8	151
9	398
10	151, 179
12	155
13	299
14	138
15	151, 152
17	276
18	152
19	398
20	140, 272, 339
21	152
23	165
24	180
25	266
26	145
27	156
28	165, 167
29	187
30	259
31	259

VERSES	PAGES

CHAPTER XXII.

1	143
2	143, 288, 292
3	352
4	140, 188
6	303
7	139
8	151
9	146, 288, 300
10	126
11	153, 165, 327
12	155
13	263
14	283, 398
15	304, 340
16	141, 288, 297
17, etc.	4
18	165
22	4, 288
23	288
24	204
26, 27	80
29	272

CHAPTER XXIII.

1-3	333
4	145
5	140
9	125, 170, 348
10	291
11	291
13-14	303-310
15	306
16	166, 306
17	151, 308
17-21	313
18	151
21	140
24	306
26-28	123
27	398
29-35	4, 76, 281

CHAPTER XXIV.

1	151
5	256

VERSES	PAGES
6	256
7	177
9	126, 341
11, 12	5, 155, 197, 299
15	26, 151
16	151
17	314
18	314
19	151
20	151
21	5, 329
22	329
23	330
23-34	3, 5
24	154
25	154
26	176
27	352
28	314
29	314
30-34	82, 270
34	263

CHAPTER XXV.

xxv.-xxix.	5
2	169
6, 7	5
8	208
9	208
11	174
12	164, 175
14	180
17	244
18	167
20	174
21, 22	6, 314
23	169
24	398
26	153
28	206

CHAPTER XXVI.

1	340
2	168
3-12	341-349
10	346
12	180
13	263

VERSES	PAGES
14	263
15	263
16	263
18	170
19	170
20	169
21	166, 204
22	169
23-28	168
24	151
26	151

CHAPTER XXVII.

1	350
2	180
3	341
4	356
5	182
6	232
8	5, 243
9	232
10	233, 244
11	306
12	352
13	80
14	229, 237
15	398
16	398
17	231
18	350, 360
19	230
20	350, 354
21	182
22	340
23-27	5, 140, 270

CHAPTER XXVIII.

xxviiii. generally	5
1	155
2	332
3	296
4	154, 385
6	142
8	141, 297
9	156, 385
11	143
12	154, 332
13	362
14	362
15	332
16	332
18	152
19	267, 270
20	145
22	145
23	168, 175, 182
26	38, 183, 348
27	146, 298
28	154

CHAPTER XXIX.

1	88
2	5, 154, 332
3	306
4	332
5	168
6	152
7	300
8	204
9	341
11	166, 205, 345
12	333
14	328
15	310
16	151
17	310
18	375
20	170
22	204
23	180
25	335
26	335
27	148

CHAPTER XXX.

xxx. generally	6, 386
1-4	390, 392
5-9	393
8	146
9	146
13	89
22	332, 339
25, 27	83
31	329
32, 33	167

CHAPTER XXXI.

xxxi. generally	6, 397
1	397
2-8	334
3	397
4	278
5	278
6	278
7	278
8	176
9	176
10-31	400, 410
27	273
30	302

GENERAL INDEX.

AGASSIZ, 144.
Agriculture, 140, 269.
Agur, 386.
Anger, 205.
Ant, the, 83.
Atheism, unknown to Israel, 11, 18.
Atonement, meaning of, 362, 371.

BACON, 16, 230.
Bible, its character, 382.
Buddha, his teaching quoted, 71.
Burns, quoted, 293.

Carlyle, 305.
Catholic, the Catholic Church, 246.
Chastening, 51.
Christ, 93, 103, 107, 117, 120, 133, 148, 212, 227, 247, 258, 273, 318, 326, 330, 335, 348, 360, 383.
—— His use of the Proverbs, 124, 126, 127, 128, 130, 159, 314.
Church, the, 247.
Coleridge, 16.
Commercial life, 41, 86, 218, 226.
Competition, 31.
Confession, 364.
Conscience, 225, 252, 343.
Contentment, 356.
Conversion, 104, 212, 287, 320.
"Corners," 295.
Covetousness, 30.
Creation, the poem of, 112.
Criticism 181.

DANDY, the, 95.
Darwin, 16.
Death, not terrible, 41.
Diligence, 139, 262 *et seq.*
Distribution, economic, 136.
Donatello, 183.
Drink, 275 *et seq.*
Drunkard, the, 76, 277.

ECCLESIASTES, quoted. 10.
Ecclesiasticus, 9, 12, 22, 81, 139, 144, 169, 184, 218, 250, 306, 400.
Education, 52 *et seq.*, 303 *et seq.*
Equality, 294.
Evolution, 113.

FAITH, the life of, 356.
Fanaticism, 287.
Fitness, in speech, 170, 174.
Flattery, 168.
Folly, 67, 92, 122, 131, 205.
Fool, the, 337 *et seq.*
Forgiveness, 314 *et seq.*
—— God's, 370.
Francis, St., 190.
Friendship, 227 *et seq.*

GAMBLING, 32.
God, His existence, 391.
—— men need Him, 43.
—— relation with human life, 47, 155, 197, 199, 217, 236, 252, 291, 353.
Gregg, quoted, 73.

HEALTH, result of wisdom, 39.
Heathenism, 158, 377.
Heaven, 59, 162, 274.
Hell, 59, 73.
Henry II., 106.
Home, 53.
Honesty, 224.
Hudibras, quoted, 266.
Humility, 44, 127, 184, 189.

IDLENESS, ruinous, 266.
Immortality, 378.
Impurity, 25, 27, 29.
Indra, drunk, 279.
Inspiration of the book of Proverbs, 157.
Inwardness, 60.

JAHVEH, 15, 21.
Jakeh, 6.
Joy, 193.
Justification, 161.

KING, the, 326 *et seq.*
—— Divine right of, 331.

LAND, the land question, 270.
Lanfranc, anecdote of, 205.
Law, 113.
Lemuel, 6, 396.
Liberality, 43, 145.
Lies, 89, 130, 167, 330.
Livingstone, 59.
Lot, the, use of, 217.
Love, 209, 235, 311.

MAN, 114.
Marriage, 69, 401.
Massa, Gen. xxv. 14, 6.
Meekness, 172, 210.
Milton, quoted, 59 69, 111, 133, 316, 367.
Misanthrope, the, 240.
Misapplication of Scripture, 346.
Morality, relation to science, 116.
Mother's influence, 397.
—— neglect, 53.
Murder, 90.

NABAL, 339.
National righteousness, 154.
Neighbourliness, 244.

OBEDIENCE, 385.

PARENTS, duties of, 306.
Paton, John, 54, 217.
Paul, St., 359.
Pauperism, 290.
Plain speaking, 65, 102.
Pleasure, 276.
Poor, the, 43, 141, 143, 176, 288 *et seq.*
Positivism, 378.
Pride, 89, 179 *et seq.*, 210.
Proverbs, book of, its limitations, 22, 211, 316, 347.
Punishment, 87, 309 *et seq.*

QUARRELLING, 166.

RASHNESS, 170.
Realism, 66, 92.
Reason, 341.
Remorse, 77.
Repetition of Proverbs, 2 (*note*).

Reproof, 175.
Revelation, necessary, 20, 375 *et seq.*, 393.
Revenge, 316.
Robespierre, 377.
Rubies, valley of, 49.

SCIENCE, depends on theology, 113.
—— its limitations, 379, 380.
Scorner, the, 125, 129.
Servants, treatment of, 387.
Shakespeare, quoted, 73, 86, 234, 241.
Sin, its nature, 363, 367.
—— its results, 71, 74, 101.
—— its seductions, 68.
Sister, 94.
Sluggard, the, 82, 263.
Socialism, 137, 147, 395.
Solomon, not the author of the whole book, 2, 106.
Speech, its power, 164.
Suretiship, 80.
Sweating, 31, 296.
Sympathy, 196.

THEISM, necessary to knowledge, 19.
Temper, 203, 207.
Temperance, 280, 286.
Tennyson, quoted, 67.
Truth, injured by drink, 283.

WEALTH, 135 *et seq.*
—— true, 356.
Wife, the, 399 *et seq.*
Will, freedom of, 251 *et seq.*
Wisdom, meaning of, 10.
—— person of, 92, 108, 123.
—— rewards of, 37, 109.
—— the book of, 9, 10.
—— the book of, quoted, 118.
Woman, 96, 132, 396.
Work, its blessings, 268.
Worthless man, the, 84.

YOUTH, dangers of, 34.

ZACCHÆUS, 367.
Zola, 67.

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